

Email Etiquette 101

These guidelines are meant as professional advice for email, SMS and chat communications but are tailored to the current and future academic environment.

Top Seven Tips

1. **Don't email your professor to ask for materials that are already posted to your course management system.** If you need something, either your professor anticipated it or someone else has already asked for it. It is probably already available to you. Check for it!
2. **Don't email your professor asking (or complaining) about your grades.** If there is a problem with a graded assignment, or you need to find out what you made on an assignment, *make an appointment with your professor* or go by during office hours. Also, don't email your professor asking if they have graded your assignment. They will let you know when they have.
3. **Don't expect an immediate response to your email.** Emailing your professors at 2am is fine. But don't expect an answer by 8am. Each professor has a different work schedule, and probably has a personal life as well. Email is a great way to get your question to your professor, but realize they may not be able to answer until they have time.
4. **You are what you email.** Your emails to your professor help shape their professional opinion about you. In some settings, email is the dominant opportunity for the professor to form an opinion about you. You may be one of those individuals who is quiet and respectful in person, but a flame troll behind the keyboard (look it up). Every email adds to the professor's profile. Read each email twice before sending.
5. **Use a meaningful subject, and include your Course Number and Section Number.** Try to use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. For instance, when you send an email to a professor requesting information about a class or program, it is better to mention the actual name of the program, e.g. 'BS-ISA' than to just say 'major question' in the subject.
6. **Use proper spelling, grammar & punctuation.** This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar and punctuation give a bad impression of your education, it is also important for conveying the message properly. And, if your program has a spell checking option, why not use it?
7. **Be concise and to the point.** Do not make an e-mail longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an e-mail is harder than reading printed communications and a long e-mail can be very discouraging to read.

Tips about Content

8. **Think about what you are asking for before emailing.** Your professors are busy people too. A quick email asking their opinion on type of school supplies you need, or to whether to bring their textbook to class may be trivial. “I need to know this and you need to tell me right now” may be the message you are sending with a trivial email.
9. **Answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions.** An email reply must answer all questions, and pre-empt further questions – If you do not answer all the questions in the original email, you will receive further e-mails regarding the unanswered questions, which will not only waste your time and your professor’s time but also cause considerable frustration.
10. **Don’t email your professor and tell them you won’t be in class.** Bringing unnecessary attention to your absence only wastes your and your professor’s time. Unless your absence impacts a grade component, just miss the class. Your professor may not know you weren’t there. If a grade component is involved, you will need a university-approved excuse anyway. Telling your professor your wife is sick, and you have a meeting, and the kids are on vacation is inappropriate. Professors have families and personal lives too, and work hard to make sure we don’t inconvenience your academic life.
11. **Don’t email your professor asking for their notes.** Your professors work hard to prepare and deliver their lectures. If you fail to take notes, miss class, or lose your notes, contact your peers first. Odds are there are 10-20 other students in that class that have notes. In today's environment, most professors post draft notes before and final notes after lectures.
12. **Do not attach unnecessary files.** By sending large attachments you can annoy your professors and even fill their email boxes. Only send attachments when they are absolutely necessary, and then be conscious of their size.
13. **Don’t email a draft of your assignment to your professor for review.** Your professors make assignments to assess your learning. Asking them to grade an assignment twice is unfair to them and to your peers. If you want guidance on completing an assignment, make an appointment or come by during office hours. Emailing your assignments to your professor asking for an informal review is a way of saying, “my time is more valuable than yours, tell me EXACTLY what I need to do to get a good grade.”

NOTE: Some professors encourage draft review, but check with your professor or class syllabus before emailing an assignment.
14. **When in doubt, your professor will delete.** If your professor receives an email they don’t feel is appropriate, the standard response may be to simply delete it. So if you send an email that you don’t hear back from quickly, reread what you sent, then visit the professor face-to-face to get an answer. The professor may have simply been out of the office.

Tips about Etiquette

15. **Read the email before you send it.** A lot of people don't bother to read an email before they send it out, as can be seen from the many spelling and grammar mistakes contained in emails. Apart from this, reading your mail through the eyes of the recipient will help you send a more effective message and avoid misunderstandings and inappropriate comments.
16. **Don't email your professor and copy the Dept Chair, Program Director or Dean.** Unless you are emailing a glowing thank you, or congratulations message, any message you would need to copy a professor's supervisors on should be delivered in person. Emailing and copying their supervisor will only make your position tougher to defend, whatever it is.
17. **Treat your faculty (and fellow students) with respect, even in email.** Your professors are dedicated to your education. We will attempt to create a supportive learning environment that is conducive to your degree pursuits. Don't misinterpret this "kinder, gentler professor" model with an offer of friendship or an invitation to treat us as peers. Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof. and *unless specifically invited*, don't refer to them by first name. Respect us, and we will respect you.
18. **Refrain from bad-mouthing any of your professors or even any fellow students by email or out loud in the presence of any member of the faculty.** It's just unprofessional. Remember Email is forever, and professors have been known to compare notes and talk to each other! Do not assume that two of your professors are not close collaborators on a research project or see each other socially.
19. **DON'T Make it personal.** E-mail be should personally addressed, but not overly personal. Maintain your professional attitude when communicating with your professors.
20. **Avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT.** Even more so than the high-priority option, you must at all times try to avoid these types of words in an email or subject line. Only use this if it is a really, really urgent or important message.
21. **Don't send or forward emails containing libelous, defamatory, offensive, racist or obscene remarks.** By sending or even just forwarding one libelous, or offensive remark in an email, you and your organization (business, school, association, etc.) can face court cases resulting in multi-million dollar penalties.
22. **Answer (and expect an answer) swiftly, but intelligently.** We send an e-mail because we wish to receive a quick response. Each e-mail should be replied to within at least 24 hours, and preferably within the same working day. Note the emphasis on WORKING DAY. Don't expect your professor to respond quickly late at night and on weekends.
23. **Do not write in CAPITALS. IF YOU WRITE IN CAPITALS IT SEEMS AS IF YOU ARE SHOUTING.** This can be highly annoying and might trigger an unwanted response in the form of a flame mail. Therefore, try not to send any email text in capitals.

Tips about Formatting

24. **Be careful with formatting.** Remember that when you use formatting in your emails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended. When using colors, use a color that is easy to read on the background.
25. **Use proper structure & layout.** Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and lay out is very important for e-mail messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point as separate to keep the overview.
26. **Avoid long sentences.** Try to keep your sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words. Email is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters. Also take care not to send emails that are too long. If a person receives an email that looks like a dissertation, chances are that they will not even attempt to read it!
27. **Take care with abbreviations and emoticons.** In business emails, try not to use abbreviations such as BTW (by the way) and LOL (laugh out loud). The recipient might not be aware of the meanings of the abbreviations and in business emails these are generally not appropriate. The same goes for emoticons, such as the smiley :-). If you are not sure whether your recipient knows what it means, it is better not to use it.

Best Regards.

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