EMAIL ETIQUETTE (ACADEMIC & PROFESSIONAL)

We all know that it is easy to blur the division between our personal and our academic and professional communications. This short guide is designed to give you the basics needed to communicate effectively in an academic or professional setting with instructors, advisors, fellow students, potential employers, current employers, or anyone really!

Subject Line of the Email

The subject line is designed to give the reader a snapshot of what to expect from the email. The key here is to be specific, but short. For instance, “hey” does not give the reader any idea why you are reaching out. On the other hand, “Question about Discussion 1” is very specific. The instructor, in this case, can see that it is time-sensitive and knows exactly what to reference in order to assist a student.

Tip: Subject lines are the very first impression you make and may determine whether or not your email gets read. Also, subject lines should only include the subject and not the entire email message.

Greeting

Always begin your emails with the proper title or name for the person you are contacting. “Dear Professor Jones” is a standard greeting for faculty. If you are on a first name basis with your advisors, you can address them by their first name, otherwise use a standard greeting such as “Dear Ms. Jones.”

Tip: It is acceptable to drop the “Dear” and just state the title or name, such as simply writing Professor Jones.

Body of the Email

Keep your email short and state the purpose of your communication right away. Write as a professional communicating with another professional. State clearly and concisely what you need to say. You do not need to include excuses or justifications for why you are writing. Do not offer long explanations about what time of night it was or other extraneous details. If the faculty member wants to know more, they will ask. This guide on Writing Expectations can help you write a professional message.

Common issues you might address with a faculty member include understanding instructions, late assignments, missing class, grades, Turnitin® issues, or how to locate resources.

Tip: Be sure that your tone is professional. Avoid emotional language about your feelings and your beliefs. Do not write an email while you are angry, as this anger will come through in the tone of your email. And just because you are typing out an email on a phone does not mean that you can ignore correct writing conventions, such as punctuation and spelling.

Closing and Signature

Keep your closing short and direct. For instance, “Thank you for your time.” After your closing line, be sure to include your name. For your Ashford emails, a standard closing should include:

Name
Course number (such as ENG 122)
Student ID number

Tip: Do not use P.S. to keep piling on information after you close. Say it in the body of the email.
General Best Practices

- Use a professional tone. Write as one professional writing to another professional.
- Keep your email within one to two paragraphs; long emails are often disregarded or at least put at the bottom of the to-do list.
- Use spelling and grammar check, and proofread your email before sending.
- Use a standard 10-12-point font such as Times New Roman or Arial.
- Use a standard black text against a white background for ease of reading.
- Never use all caps as this usage is considered shouting in the online world.
- Do not use graphic elements as background images.
- As a professional courtesy, be sure to respond to all emails within 48 hours, and allow others this same timeframe to respond to your emails.

Sample Emails

The following is an example of an email that needs work. It needs to be written more formally, it should be proofed for spelling and grammar issues, and it is missing a greeting and a closing with a signature. Also, the purpose of the email is buried at the very bottom of the message, and it is not clear exactly what the student does not understand.

I am REALLY excited to start class. I have always dreamed of becoming a writer or an author of some sort. I made my first book when i was in kind garten. My mother was so proud and she gold me that I can do anything I wanted if i worked and studies hard. That is why i am here. But I need your help cause I do not understand the assignment for week one. Can you help me?

Thnx

Revised Email from Student

Good evening Ms. Jones:

I am really excited to start class. I am having some trouble understanding the first assignment. The instructions say to write a formal journal but I am not sure what that means. Can you help me?

Thank you for your time,

Sam Student
Course: ENG 122
Student ID: 123456