

How to Email Your Professor

Missed a class? Need an extension on a paper? Want to set up an appointment during office hours? You'll probably have to send an email. That email is going to make an impression on your professor— for better or for worse. These simple guidelines from the Department of Humanities and Communication and the Writing Center can help you make sure it's for the better.

Frequency

If you need to email any single professor more than twice in a single day, you should instead seek them out in person. Email is best suited to short questions, not long discussions.

Email Account

Be careful of using non-university email accounts to email professors. There is no problem with using a Hotmail or Gmail account, but please make sure your real name shows up in the From line of the email. It is easier to place "David Seltzer" than "MacDaddy15."

Subject Line

Email Subject lines should at the very least include the course title or name. Sending an email simply titled "question" may get it automatically routed into the junk mail folder without your professor even seeing it. Instead, try using "Comp1 (or ENG 103.01) question about paper".

Greeting

Don't simply launch into your email with no greeting. Instead, address your professors in a friendly, professional manner at the start of your email. "Hi/Hello/Dear Professor/Dr. Smith," will work just fine.

Politeness

Think of your professors as real people and an email as a real conversation. If you need something from a professor, please ask politely. "Would you please send me the assignment at your earliest convenience?" is much more likely to get a response than, "I need that assignment now."

Complaints

If you're upset about a grade or something else in the class, don't trust email! No matter how hard you try to be polite, your email may come off as angry or rude, and hurt your chances of getting a fair hearing. If you've got a complaint, send a polite email asking for an in-person appointment.

“Dear Professor Smith, I would like to set up a time to meet with you to discuss my progress in the class. I am free Wednesday and Thursday mornings after 10am. Please let me know when is convenient for you,” is a completely acceptable, risk-free way to do this.

Proofreading

We are in a rapidly changing world of communication. While the substitution of “u” for “you,” or “r” for “are” might be acceptable in text messages with your friends, they are not acceptable in emails to professors (especially those teaching grammar). Please proofread your emails. Look for appropriately placed capital letters and accuracy of grammar and spelling. If it is so overwhelmingly filled with errors that it becomes difficult to read your professor may not respond.

Signature

Please sign with your full name, course number, and time of meeting. If you don't know the course number, the actual course name (Comp 1, Intro to Lit, etc.) is an acceptable substitution.

Derek Rothwell
ENG 103.01 (Comp 1) / MWF 11:00

This is a huge help to your professors. While they probably know who you are, they may teach multiple sections of the same course and find it difficult to remember if you're in the TTh 9:30 class or the MWF 9:00 one. The easier you make it for your professors, the faster their response is likely to be.