



E-mail Your Professor

Goals:

- ✓ To present yourself as a competent student addressing an expert in a field
- ✓ To increase the likelihood of getting the answers and results you request

Before You Start Writing...

Research: Check the syllabus, class notes, Gaucho Space, or a classmate to see if the information you seek is already available to you. If you have a complicated or time-sensitive issue, stop by office hours.

Show respect: Sending an e-mail to your professor is more formal than an e-mail to a friend or coworker. Use respectful, formal language. The e-mail should be similar to a letter, not a text.

Emotions: If you are feeling angry or sad, wait a day, or wait until you are calm, then send the e-mail. Fill in the address field *last* to avoid an accidental send.

Remember: Each professor has different expectations. Some expect you to e-mail a TA first.

Writing the E-mail...

Subject Line: Include a very clear subject line. Instead of “homework,” try, “Re: COMS 101 Assignment.”

Greeting: “Dear Professor (last name)” or “Dear Dr. (last name)” are appropriate and respectful greetings. Ensure you are spelling your professor’s name correctly. Do not address a professor by first name, or by gender (e.g. “Dear Mark,” “Mrs.” “Miss” “Mr.”).

Introduce yourself: Remember that professors often teach many classes and may have hundreds of students. State your name and class/section to help the professor identify you.

The purpose: State why you are e-mailing the professor. It is best to make it concise and courteous. Do not add long excuses, blaming, begging, or paragraphs of details. You may want to explain what you’ve already tried to find the answer yourself.

Time frame: Avoid demanding phrases like, “get back to me as soon as possible.” Try, “I would appreciate assistance at your earliest convenience.” Remember that professors often have many obligations in addition to teaching.

Avoid e-mailing every day to follow-up. Instead, wait a week before sending another e-mail. It can be hard to wait, but it is the appropriate response. You can also state how you plan to follow up (e.g. “I’ll plan to stop by your office hours if I don’t hear back from you by Friday”).

Good-bye: Thank the professor for his/her time and sign off with, “Sincerely, (first and last name).”

Etiquette: The e-mail should be brief, instead of a page-long description. Reread your e-mail once it is complete. Use spell check. Do not use slang words, abbreviations, emojis, or ALL CAPS.

The Ombuds Office can help you draft an e-mail, or talk with you about next steps if an e-mail didn’t help.

Call us at (805) 893-3285 to schedule an appointment.