

How to Email Your Professors

Everyone seemingly has a smartphone nowadays and with that comes both texting and emailing on a mobile device. I've seen several students send emails that are a sort of text-email hybrid, and this will not come across well to most professors (and T.A.s). Hence, this is a list of "email commandments" so to speak, that will hopefully help make your emails more professional.

1. PROOFREAD!!!

How many times have you proofread an email (or text) after sending it, only to realize you made a mistake?

*tip - don't enter the intended email address until you've typed and proofread your email.

2. Use a professional email address with an appropriate name.

Bizarre emails will often go to a professor's spam; we are also not inclined to open emails from suspicious-looking email addresses. And for goodness sake, make your email address professional!

*tip - an email address that uses your first/last names or initials is most appropriate, e.g., nakaoj@udel.edu. Don't use an email address like happyhappymeatball@gmail.com.

3. Address an email to a professor (or T.A.) as if you're emailing a professional employer.

You might text your friends with "Hey, John Doe" or "Whatsup," but this is too informal and not appropriate in an email.

*example - "Dear Professor" or "Hi Professor"

4. PLEASE start each new sentence with a capital letter!

In general, try to use proper grammar.

5. In general, avoid emoticons (e.g., :3 >:) ;)) or abbreviations (e.g., "lol," "brb," "ttyl")!

These are typically not appropriate in an email. A smiley face :) can be okay if used properly, but it's best to not use one if you're unsure.

6. Keep it succinct, specific, and to the point.

If the point of your email gets "lost in the sauce," then I'm not going to easily tell what you want.

*GOOD example -

Dear Mr. Nakao,

I overslept past my alarm this morning and missed the CANVAS quiz. May I please make it up?

Best regards,
Jane Doe

*BAD example (for so many reasons) -

Hey man,

I totally overslept and missed the thing. I won't do it again. When can I make it up?

Thanks.

*comments on the bad example - the student is vague about which assignment/quiz/exam they missed and assumes they will receive a makeup opportunity.

7. DO NOT put your student ID in your email signature.

This is private information with which a malicious stranger could cause a lot of trouble! There's a reason your private university documents require your student ID.

*example - an appropriate student signature is

Best regards,

Joseph H. Nakao
Seattle University | Class of 2018
Website | www.jhknakao.wixsite.com/math

8. A little appreciation goes a long way.

Please be polite and respectful over email, especially to your professors and T.A.s. We know that you have busy lives (we were also undergrads at one point), but please be mindful of ours. A simple "Thank you for your time" at the end of an email never hurts.