

Emails as professional correspondences or Email Etiquette*

These days email is the increasingly common and preferred form of contact between students, faculty and staff. Keep in mind that such email exchanges are a form of professional correspondence and permanent document of a communication between two (or more) people. Therefore, be sure that your emails are polite, professional, and well prepared before you send them.

1. Use your University (clarku) account to make sure that you receive class, Program, Department and University related information. Furthermore, send messages using your Clarku account to ensure that your email does not get filtered out as junk.
2. Begin your message with an appropriate SALUTATION such as "Dear/Hello/Hi/Professor ABC." A message that begins and ends without a greeting or salutation could be seen as rudeness or indifference on the part of the writer. Address your academic instructors and advisors properly. Unless they instruct you otherwise, address faculty as "Professor" or "Dr."
3. Include a SUBJECT line to accurately describe the purpose of the email. If it is course related, then include the course name or number in the subject line. In his blogspot, Prof Leddy notes, "Question about readings for ID125, Feb 2 class" is clear and sounds genuine, while "a question?" looks like spam.
4. BEFORE sending an email to determine whether your inquiry is appropriate, consult the class syllabus and the Blackboard site for course policies. Course readings, office hours, assignment details and writing guidelines, grading criteria, policies on missed classes and exams, etc. are usually addressed there and discussed in class. DO write if you need clarification or further information.
5. ALLOW some time for a response. Although most faculty try to answer email promptly, do not expect to receive a reply to your message within 48 hours or over a weekend. Some responses might be faster, others slower.

There are many parts to a professor's job (teaching, research, service to the Department and the University, and the administrative parts of those including preparing classes, grading exams, writing letters of reference for students, working on or presenting our research among others). Most faculty do not have administrative help (what used to be called "secretaries" when sexism was more open rather than as covert as it is now) and it takes us time to do the various parts of our job. Allow some time-up to a week-before sending a gentle reminder.

6. If you receive a message with a query or request for information, please RESPOND in a timely manner to the faculty, staff or classmates who write to you. Ignoring queries or not supplying the required information (regarding MA paper topics, graduation requirements, RSVPs for events, etc) is taken as lack of professionalism on your part.
7. A few other important email issues:
 - Write using complete words and sentences, use correct grammar and punctuation, and proofread what you've written.
 - Be succinct but when responding to emails, do include the preceding email(s), or parts thereof.

- If addressing a different topic, do not hit “Reply.” Rather start a blank email with a new, appropriate subject line.
- As a courtesy to your correspondent, acknowledge the receipt of a message. A simple “Thanks” or “Got the xyz, thanks” is sufficient.
- Remember that email is not confidential. The contents of your message can be shared easily by its recipient, or read by others without your or the recipient’s knowledge.

8. Finally email is not a substitute for face-to-face consultations. Faculty often lament that students fail to take advantage of office hours to meet with them. Requests for recommendation letters, discussions about assignments or grades, and in-depth conversations about academic topics are best had in person.

Communication etiquette applies to face-to-face interactions as well. For instance, rather than asking a professor for their office hours, check for them on the syllabus, on Blackboard, in the signature file of any prior email communication, or on their office door.

* Written after consulting the following sites

www.cit.gu.edu.au/~davidt/email_etiquette.htm

www.mleddy.blogspot.com/2005/01/how-to-e-mail-professor.html

www.chem.indiana.edu/academics/ugrad