

# Tips & Templates

## Establishing Good Communication (Emails, etc.) with Faculty & Mentors

Whether you're writing a professor to make an appointment, ask for an extension or to look for a research opportunity, your emails to faculty members should be clear, polite, and to the point. While *we recommend being your authentic self*, it is helpful to have a template to help you get started.

Below are some guidelines for how to make a good impression over email.

### Email Etiquette

#### Keep your email professional

If you're emailing a professor for the first time, it's better to err on the side of being too formal rather than too casual. If they prefer that you use their first name, they will let you know. Follow these rules of basic email etiquette:

- Begin with a greeting and address your recipient by title and last name (*Dear Professor Lastname*)
- Pay attention to pronouns (this is for emailing anyone)

- Use full sentences and proper grammar, avoiding slang and emojis
- Keep the tone of your email courteous
- End with a concluding phrase and your name (*Sincerely, Student Last Name*)
- Give a useful subject line (*Assignment on X*)

## **Stay brief and to the point**

Long emails often get ignored until the recipient has time to deal with them, and faculty are extremely busy. Your email should focus on a specific item, such as setting up a time to meet or informing your professor of an upcoming absence. If you need to talk about something more involved, it is probably better to make an appointment to meet in person unless your professor tells you otherwise.

## **Reply in a timely fashion**

Your professors appreciate a prompt reply just as much as you do. If a faculty member asks you for something that will take some time (for example, a report on your progress in the lab), reply quickly to confirm that you're working on the task and provide a timeline for completion. Most faculty appreciate acknowledging receipt of an email (Simply, reply that you have received the email and will follow up).

## **Emailing to Ask for Extensions, Exceptions, and Allowances**

Maybe you've been sick and have been missing class, or maybe you're dealing with an unexpected emergency. Whatever your circumstances, communication is key! It is best to inform your instructors of your situation as soon as you can and ask if they can make allowances for you in accordance with their class and departmental policies.

Briefly explain your situation-- *you don't have to give details if it makes you uncomfortable and you are not required to disclose any personal or sensitive information*. Ask specifically for whatever allowance you're seeking (for example,

an extension on a paper, or an alternate exam time). And do mention any support you're getting because your instructors are most likely worried about you.

For example:

*Dear Professor So-and-So,*

*I'm Jane, a student in your X class. Because of a family emergency, I will be away from campus all of next week. I am writing to apologize for my absence from class and ask if I might have an extension on the paper due next Friday. Any allowance you can provide would be deeply appreciated. I have been talking with my Academic Advisor about my situation and have copied her on this message.*

*Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to hearing back from you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Jane Student*

In certain cases, there may be department policies or other logistical challenges that faculty need to work out for tests, grading, etc. Therefore, it is always helpful to inform your instructor about your situation and ask as soon as possible for any extension needed. Remember that your professors are human too. They are willing to help you, just keep the doors of communication open.

## **Emailing a Potential Mentor for the First Time**

When you reach out to a new professor that you want to connect with, your goal should be to set up a time to meet and talk in person. Keep your email short and to the point. For example:

*Dear Professor So-and-So,*

*I'm Jane, a prospective X major particularly interested in Y. I am writing you because I noticed that you teach classes in Y/ I read your paper on Y/ the Student Services Officer in your department suggested I reach out to you. I would love to get your advice on how I can get involved with research on Y during my time at Lincoln*

*University. Could I come by during your office hours? Please let me know.*

*Sincerely,  
Jane Student*

If the professor doesn't respond, don't lose hope! The professor might be particularly busy that week, or out of town, or simply missed your message in a flood of other emails. Try to reach out again. You can send a follow up email, or you can stop by in person during the professor's office hours to introduce yourself and ask if you can set up a time to meet later.

## **Emailing With your Faculty Mentor**

As you develop relationships with particular professors, pay close attention to their communication styles. Especially if you are working with faculty on tangible outcomes (for example, teaching assistant assignment or presentation), it's a good idea to explicitly discuss communication preferences.

Here are some questions you might consider when thinking about a professor's communication style:

- Does this professor respond to emails quickly or is it better to call or stop by office hours for quick responses?
- How formal is the professor in written communication?
- What sorts of questions or topics can be resolved by email, and which require meeting in person?
- Are there situations where a phone or zoom meeting might be preferable?
- Please remember it is important for you to also set boundaries. If you prefer not to answer over weekends or late evenings, do not feel obligated unless there is an urgent situation.
- Some mentors prefer to text with mentees, which is acceptable if mutually agreed upon.

Regardless of your mentor's style, it will benefit you to be the active, responsible party in organizing one-on-one communication. Reach out, respond promptly, and remember to keep your emails short, specific, and courteous.