

# Emailing Your Teachers: Tips for Students

“Emails are typically hasty...(but) when you are writing a serious email, absolutely the last thing you should be trying to do is to save yourself a little time.”

(Larry Trask, “How to Write Effective Emails,” Penguin Books)

The email message below provided some of the inspiration for this handout:

*Hey Prof, this is nick from your bio class, i managed to set my alarm wrong and missed the test today, is it pocipal for me to take it at a difrent time. i work at night and have never functioned properly in the morning. Also, what may i do to make up the absences I have in the the class, and help would be greatly appreciated. life has been a little crazy for the past couple months. thank you-nick.*

So what would a good email to a professor look like?

*Hi Professor Smith,*

*I’m reading the Palumbi article “Humans as the World’s Greatest Evolutionary Force” and I’m not sure which section of the lecture material this relates to. Can you lead me in the right direction? Thanks.*

*Amy Jones, Bio 215, MWF 12:00*

**Consider any email to a professor/teacher a serious, business-type communication that requires a different and more formal approach than the casual emails that you “shoot” to your friends. The following tips are modified from Michael Leddy**

**(<http://mleddy.blogspot.com/2005/01/how-to-e-mail-professor.html>)**

1. **ALWAYS include the course number in your subject line.** “Question re Bio 361” is clear and sounds genuine, while “a question” looks like spam.
2. **Reply with History.** Include the previous emails with your response as long as the subject remains the same, so it will be immediately evident what has been discussed. When the subject changes, start a new email with a new subject-line.
3. **This is not text messaging. Use upper case letters where appropriate, and ask politely.** “I can’t make any of your office hours. Will it be convenient for me to come by on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, at 8:30am?” is a lot better than “I need to meet u at a different time.”
4. **Write from your university email account (if possible).** That immediately lets your professor see that your email is legitimate and not spam. A cryptic, cutesy, or salacious personal email address that might be okay when you send an email to a friend is not appropriate when you are writing to a professor. Consider, in light of this advice, the following examples:

An email from “qtpie2008” with the subject line “question” or an email from a university account with the subject line “question about Biology 205 readings.”

Which one looks legitimate? Which one looks like spam?

5. **Choose an appropriate greeting.** “Hi/Hello Professor [Blank]” is always appropriate. Substitute “Dear” if you have ended up writing a letter, leave out “Hi” and your tone is too brusque.
6. **What should a student call a professor?** Some people like “Doctor;” some don’t. Some professors don’t have doctoral degrees. Professor, in the absence of any other guideline, is a good choice.
7. **Proof read what you’ve written. Use spell check.** If your email does not have spell check, then copy and paste your text into a word document that does have spell check, make the corrections, and then paste the text back into your email.
8. **Sign with your full name, course number, and meeting time.** For example, Maggie Smith, Biology 215, MWF 1pm. Signing is an obvious courtesy, and it eliminates the need for stilted self-identification (“I am a student in your such-in-such class”).
9. **Don’t ask questions that require lengthy answers.** Questions that require lengthy answers are best asked in person during office hours.

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