

Email Etiquette for Students

Email etiquette is important in a college setting because email is often the main mode of communication between students and professors. Students may have trouble communicating in the classroom if the class is large, and students may be unable to visit professors during their office hours.

What Are Inappropriate Email Topics?

Be aware that most college professors receive copious emails daily. If you have a simple question about an assignment, such as the due date, try referring to the syllabus or asking a classmate before contacting your professor.

DO NOT email your professor if

- you have a question about an assignment due the same day.
- you have a question or comment unrelated to the course content.
- you are turning in an assignment, and your professor does not accept assignments through email.
- you are requesting an extension (since your professor may not see it in time).
- your question or comment will require an extended response.
- you have a confidential personal issue or complaint you would like to disclose.**

**An email can potentially be read by anyone (e.g., if you accidentally send it to the wrong person). Try to arrange time outside of class to discuss confidential and/or personal matters face to face.

What Are Appropriate Email Topics?

You **may** email your professor if

- your question cannot be answered by a classmate or the syllabus.
- you have a question about an assignment due after the next class session.
- you have a question or comment related to the course material.
- your professor accepts assignments through email.

How Do I Format an Email to my Professor?

Any email to your professor should be *professional* and *brief*.

- Identify yourself by including your full name, course number, and section number.

- Put the subject of your email in the subject line (Project Proposal).
- Use a standard font and size, such as Times New Roman, size 12.
- Keep the email brief; aim for a paragraph or a single screen of information.
- Use complete sentences and proper grammar.

What Kind of Diction and Tone Should I Use?

Diction refers to your word choice.

- Use a formal salutation (Dear Professor) and signature (Sincerely).
- **DO NOT** use informal language or slang words you might use when talking to a friend ("what's up," "things," "stuff," "peace out," "hella").
- **DO NOT** use emoticons (smiley faces), excessive punctuation (!!!!), or informal acronyms ("lol," "gtg," "brb," "ttyl").

Tone refers to your attitude and tone of voice.

- Adopt a formal tone as you would when contacting an employer.
- **DO NOT** try to be overly friendly or humorous.

How Do I Format Attachments?

Only attach a file if it is necessary. Remember, some professors do not accept assignments through email.

- Title your document so it is easy to identify. You could include your last name and the title of the assignment (Miller_PersonalNarrative.doc).
- Use a compatible file format, such as a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx), a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation (.ppt or .pptx), or a PDF file (.pdf).
- Mention in the email that you are attaching a file, so your professor knows it is not spam or a virus.

What Are Other Items to Remember?

- Check your grammar and sentence structure for errors.
- Check that you are sending your email to the correct email address. If you do not know your professor's email address, you could send an email to his or her SJSU email address: `firstname.lastname@sjsu.edu`.
- Many college students still use their old email addresses that are often unsophisticated or silly. Use your SJSU email address, or create an email address that includes only your name.
- Respond to emails from your professor in a timely manner.

Sample Email

Here is an example of an appropriate email to a college professor.

Subject line: LLD 100A Discipline Investigation

Dear Professor Smith,

My name is Sarah Andersen, and I am in your LLD 100A course, section 1. I had a question regarding the discipline investigation due on Monday, December 2. Although the directions state that the person whom I interview must be currently active in my field of interest, I was wondering if I could interview someone who is now retired. This person is a family friend and has had many years of work experience. If not, I can find someone to interview who is still active in the field. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Andersen

Activity: Write an Email to your Professor

Write an email to your professor requesting an appointment to discuss your paper. Be sure to include all the detail he/she needs to understand and respond to the request.