

How to Email your Professor

Sending that first email to your professor can feel a bit intimidating: how casual or formal should you be? Does your professor even know who you are? And are you just bugging them by sending them the email in the first place?

In fact, your professor is almost always glad to hear from you, but it is important to keep it professional, and to make sure that you are emailing with a clear and specific question.

Before you even start to type the e-mail, ask yourself these questions:

- Is your question already answered in the syllabus? Check there first for due dates, reading assignments, etc.
- Should you go to office hours instead? Professors' office hours are a great way to ask more open-ended questions about course material, to talk about difficulties you may be having, or to ask for advice. If you can't make it to posted office hours (again, check the syllabus!) go ahead and email to ask if there is another convenient time to meet.
- If you missed a class, don't ask them "if" you missed anything! Visit office hours or check in with another student to catch up on what you missed.

Some tips for composing the email:

- Always email from your **HWS account** to avoid languishing in junk mail.
- Include a meaningful **subject line**; try "SOC 100 assignment" instead of "hey" or "urgent request."
- That's **Professor** Snape, Harry: Whether or not your professor has a PhD, this is the appropriate title for a college professor, rather than Mr. Snape or just "Hey, Snape!" And never write "Dear Severus" until your professor has invited you to use first names, even if that's how they sign their email.
- DO use **complete sentences** and formal language.
- DON'T use **abbreviations, emojis, all caps, slang or any offensive language**.
- Remember "**please**" and "**thank you**" – these go a long way to making sure that the tone of your email is appropriate and polite.
- Sign off with a thank you, followed by "**Best regards**" and your name.
- **Proofread** and check over your email before sending!
- **Allow enough time for a reply**; when they're not teaching you, your professor is teaching other classes, prepping classes, grading, doing administrative and service work, focusing on their own research, and occasionally eating or sleeping. If you haven't heard back within a reasonable amount of time, send a polite follow-up. What's a reasonable amount of time? Again, check the syllabus; your professor may have specified how long they usually take to reply to emails.
- Do send a quick **acknowledgement** when you receive a response: "Thank you" is absolutely fine!

For more advice on the transition to college, visit the Study Mentors. Make an appointment via StudyHub on the CTL website, or stop in to visit us on the second floor of the library.