**How to Write an Email to Your Professors**

**Write from your university e-mail account**. That immediately lets your professor see that your e-mail is legitimate and not spam. The cryptic or cutesy or salacious personal e-mail address that might be okay when you send an e-mail to a friend is not appropriate when you're writing to a professor.

**Include the course number in your subject line.** "Question about lab 5 assignment" is clear and sounds genuine, while "a question" looks like spam. "Question about English assignment" or "question about assignment," without identifying the class you're in, may leave your professor with the chore of figuring that out. For someone teaching large lecture classes, that might mean reading through hundreds of names on rosters. But even for a professor with smaller classes, it's a drag to get an e-mail that merely says "I'm in your English class and need the assignment." All your English professor's classes are English classes; she or he still needs to know which one is yours. You should never send your teacher an email without a subject.

Consider, in light of this advice, the following examples:

An e-mail from "qtpie2005" with the subject line "question."

An e-mail from a university account with the subject line "Question about English 2011 essay."

Which one looks legitimate? Which one looks like spam?

**Think about what you're saying.** Most students are not accustomed to writing to their professors. Here are some ways to do it well:

**Choose an appropriate greeting.** "Dear/Hello Professor/Dr. *Last Name*” is always appropriate. “Hi” without a name and “Hey” are informal and inappropriate. Do not write out the word “Doctor.”

**Avoid rote apologies for missing class.** Most professors are tired of hearing those standard apologies and acts of contrition. If you missed class because of some especially serious or sad circumstances, it might be better to mention that in person than in an e-mail.

**Ask politely.** "Could you e-mail me the page numbers for the next reading? Thank you!" is a lot better than "I need the assignment."

**Proofread what you've written.** You want your e-mail to show you in the best possible light.

**Sign with your full name.** Ways to close an email include: “Best,” “Best Regards,” “Regards,” “Kindly,” “Gratefully,” “Respectfully,” and “Thank you.”

Signing is an obvious courtesy, and it eliminates the need for stilted self-identification ("I am a student in your such-and-such class").

One don't, and one last do:

**Don't send unexpected attachments.** It's bad form. Attaching an essay with a request that your professor look it over is very bad form. Arrange to meet your professor during office hours or by appointment instead. It's especially bad form to send an e-mail that says "I won't be in class today," with a paper or some other coursework attached. Think about it: Your professor is supposed to print out your essay because you're not coming to class?

**When you get a reply, say thank you.** Just hit Reply and say "Thank you," or a little bit more if that's appropriate. The old subject line (which will now have a "Re:" in front) will make the context clear. I don't think that you need to include a greeting with a short reply, at least not if you refer to your professor in your reply. And you don't need to identify yourself by course number and meeting time again.

Many e-mail messages end up never reaching their intended recipients, for reasons of human and technological error, so it's always appropriate to acknowledge that someone's message got through. It's also plain courtesy to say thank you. (Your professor will remember it too.) When you reply, you should delete almost everything of your professor's reply (quoting everything is rarely appropriate in e-mail). Leave just enough to make the original context clear.

So what would a good e-mail to a professor look like?

Subject: PHY 503

Dr. Smith,

I have been working on my physics assignment and I do not understand how to complete Part D. Are we doing that in class tomorrow in the lab or will I be able to do it just using the book?

Thank you,

Maggie Simpson