Effective Email Guidelines

At some point during your college career, you will inevitably need to contact someone via email: a professor, a GTA, an advisor, a staff member, or a fellow student. While email is certainly a very useful and convenient means of communication, it is critical to keep in mind that the way you construct your emails can leave an impression on anyone who reads them. Here are some tips to keep in mind when typing up your next email:

Include a greeting. - It doesn’t have to be fancy. It can be as simple as “Dear Professor ___,”. The important thing is that you acknowledge the person whom you are addressing. Simply jumping into your message or your request can sometimes be interpreted as rude or disrespectful.

Stay on topic. - Avoid including extraneous details or getting off topic altogether. Faculty, GTAs, and advisors are very busy, and more than likely, they’ll appreciate you staying clear and concise in your emails. At the same time, do make sure that you…

Include any critical information. - For example, if you have a question about a particular course, be sure to mention which course you are referring to. Professors often teach multiple courses each semester, and some of these courses have large numbers of students in them. When emailing your advisor a question about your record, include your KUID so that your information can be pulled up easily.

Use proper grammar and punctuation. - Messages written without proper attention to basic language rules come off as rushed and can make the sender appear unprofessional or, worse, uncaring. Avoid writing in all lowercase letters (or in all caps), and include punctuation to separate independent clauses, rather than allowing the whole email to run together.

Don’t get emotional. - Sometimes we encounter a situation that does not turn out the way we plan or hope. However, expressing your frustrations in an overly-emotional manner will only serve to draw your reader’s attention away from your actual question or concern. When you come into a situation that might be beyond your control, work to maintain a clear, cool head and relay the details in a matter-of-fact manner. The recipient of your email will appreciate your calm demeanor and will have a clearer sense of your real concern.

Include a closing. - Once again, this does not have to be anything fancy. But rather than ending your email abruptly, acknowledge your reader once more. A simple “Thank you” or “Sincerely” plus your name are sufficient.

Include a clear subject line. - This doesn’t have to be complicated; just a few words to give your recipient an idea about the content of your email. Examples might include, “Question about today’s lecture,” or “Possible term paper topic.” This especially comes in handy when searching for your email if it needs to be referenced later. Finally,

Give your email one last read-through. - Double-check all of the items above, as well as for the clarity of your message. Imagine you are the person on the receiving end of the email and ask yourself how you would perceive what you have written. Be sure that you are projecting the impression you want to give before hitting the send button.