

ADA UNIVERSITY

NAILING THE MAILING

Guidelines For Writing Effective Emails



Prepared as a part of Social Responsibility Project
ADA University
December, 2018

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

For some time now, emails have been the preferred means of communication between students and lecturers, outside face-to-face interaction in class or during office-hours.

These emails are usually short and to the point, but often they contain grammatical mistakes and/or stylistic infelicities which students can avoid by adhering to some basic guidelines.

FORMS OF ADDRESS

The easiest way to address someone is to write "Dear X".

Do not write "Hello X" or "Hi", that is very colloquial and would be normal among students but not appropriate between students and their lecturers. You must be on firstname terms to say "Hi" to someone.

TITLES

In the university context, there are three options: "Mr.", "Dr." and "Prof." (do not write "Prof. Dr.", this is not done in English).

In the American context, it is, common to address professors as "doctor", or "Dr." in writing, in order to be slightly less formal.

Sensitivity to titles is a personality issue. Some individuals do not mind a somewhat informal address, others take umbrage at not seeing their academic title in the opening of an email.

You may write in English: "Dear Peter Jones" (firstname + surname). This is not disrespectful and is very common when writing to strangers in contemporary English. Only use the firstname of a lecturer when you have agreed on this with him or her already.

If you want to be on the safe side, simply write "Dear Dr. Jones" or "Dear Prof. Smith" and nobody can take offence.

BODY OF EMAIL

To illustrate the text of an email a simple example is discussed. This is where a student is sending a presentation to a lecturer.

Choice of tense: do not use the simple present because in English this implies a repeated action, e.g. *"I send you my presentation"* implies that you do this again and again. So what you do in English is use an imperative preceded by *"Please"*, e.g. *"Attached please find our presentation for Tuesday"*.

If you wish, you may use the present continuous in an email, i.e. you could say *"I am sending you our presentation for tomorrow as an attachment."* If you are referring to the future, then use this tense in English, e.g. *"I will bring along the copies to class tomorrow."*

REQUESTING A REPLY

Be indirect and use the conditional. For instance, *"perhaps you might let me know if the presentation is acceptable"*, *"could you please drop me a line when you get a chance"*.

ASKING QUESTIONS

When asking questions in an email, please provide all necessary information. For instance, don't just say *"in our course"*, *"the essay i am writing"* because the lecturers have hundreds of students to supervise and need to have precise information. So state the course in question, tell what semester you are in and for what module you are writing an essay, etc. This way you will get an appropriate answer promptly.

SALUTATIONS

There are a variety of ways to end an email in English. The simplest way is *"Best regards"* or *"Best wishes"*. The expression *"Yours truly"* is quite stilted as are all the other variations on this, e.g. *"Yours sincerely"*, *"Yours faithfully"*, etc. In email correspondence, shortened forms are very common so that *"Regards"* or just *"Best"* is frequently found. That is not considered impolite and is fitting to this digital medium.

IDENTIFYING YOURSELF

The easiest way is simply to use your own firstname and surname: “James Smith”. If you know your lecturer well, you can just use your firstname, that is up to yourself. Again, whatever you feel comfortable with should be your guideline.

You may find that your lecturers reply using your firstname, e.g. “Dear James”. This is not an encroachment on your privacy, but just a sign of informality or friendliness. Some lecturers use both firstname and surname, i.e. “Dear James Smith” which is the more neutral address.

Make sure to give your student ID and your course of study in every email. Instructors need this information to communicate with the examination office and the administration in general. You can keep this information in an email signature which is automatically put at the end of any email you write.

IDENTIFYING OTHERS

If you have call in an email to refer to another student, then just say “my fellow student” (note: the word “colleague” is only used for professional co-workers) or just the firstname (and surname) of the person in question. Do not refer to another student using “Mr.” or “Mrs.”. This sounds very strange in English; it is not polite, just weird

THINK ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTORS

All instructors get lots and lots of emails (not just from students) so do not expect them to always answer within ten minutes... A reasonable time frame for an answer would be: several working days during. Also, be aware of weekends,

AND DON'T FORGET

1

*For security reasons and to ensure that your email gets through to its addressee only use your university email address, e.g.
ehasanova@ada.edu.az*

2

Always specify the topic of the email (Subject). Some spam filters will not allow emails through which do not have a topic.

3

*If you are sending an attachment, give it an explanatory name, e.g. not: "my-presentation.ppt" or "my-essay.doc", but something like:
"Leadership_Essay_Maryam Hasanova.doc.*

Writing to someone when you don't know the name;

Opening:

Dear Sir or Madam

Dear Sir / Madam

Closing:

Yours faithfully (UK)

Sincerely (US)

Writing to someone when you know the name:

Opening:

Dear Mr Thomas

Dear Dr Thomas

Dear James Thomas

Closing:

Regards

Your sincerely (UK)

Sincerely (US)

Contractions

When writing formal emails do not use contractions, such as *I'm*, *didn't*, *you'll*, etc,