

How to Email an Instructor

Reaching out to faculty can be intimidating, but learning how to craft a successful email is an important skill for all students to master—for use in college and beyond! This guide provides some general quick tips for how to communicate respectfully and effectively every time.

Subject line:

Include a relevant subject line that previews the nature of your message. It can also be helpful to include your course number and section—either at the beginning followed by a colon or at the end in parentheses. Sources differ on whether to use sentence case or title case capitalization; we suggest keeping it easy (for both yourself and the instructor) by using sentence case capitalization.

Greeting:

Always start your email with a polite greeting, which is typically composed of two parts: a salutation and a title plus name. For salutations, you can keep it simple with “Hi” or “Hello,” or make it more specific with “Good morning” or “Good afternoon.” For titles, it is generally safe to use the terms “Instructor” or “Professor” followed by their last name. If you are unsure how to address your instructor, try looking at the class syllabus to see how they refer to themselves.

Message body:

It is a good idea to start by introducing yourself since instructors often have several dozen students across different sections. Even if you and the instructor have met before, remind them of who you are and which class you are from. Afterward, communicate your message in specific but concise terms. Try to use friendly language that follows academic conventions, and avoid demands that could be interpreted as presumptuous.

- U messed up on the syllabus. The final paper’s due date says Wednesday October 2 but October 2 is a Tuesday. I need to know what day it’s really due!!!
- While reviewing the syllabus, I noticed a minor discrepancy in the final paper’s due date. Can you please verify whether the final paper is due Tuesday, October 2 or Wednesday, October 3?

Closing:

Don’t forget to thank your instructor! They will appreciate you showing respect for their time and effort. Finally, sign off with a closing followed by your name. For closings, there are endless options of varying formality, but some safe bets are “Regards” and “Sincerely.” It is also often acceptable to simply use “Thank you” as the signoff (followed by your name). When in doubt, it is better to err on the side of too formal rather than too casual.

Here is an example of a first email:

To: johndoe@anokaramsey.edu
Cc:
Subject: Question about research paper draft (ENGL 1121-53)
<p>Good morning, Professor Doe!</p> <p>My name is Sinta, and I am in your online ENGL 1121 course (section 53). I was reviewing the argumentative essay assignment sheet, and I didn't see any guidelines on citation style. Do you have a preference for whether we use MLA, APA, or another style?</p> <p>Thank you for your help!</p> <p>Best regards, Sinta Jung</p>

****Let's imagine the instructor responds that they require MLA style for all coursework****

Here is an example of a reply email:

To: johndoe@anokaramsey.edu
Cc:
Subject: Re: Question about research paper draft (ENGL 1121-53)
<p>Hi, Professor Doe!</p> <p>I appreciate your quick reply. I will use MLA style for this paper and all others in this course. See you on Thursday!</p> <p>Thank you, Sinta Jung</p>