

RE: Your Recent Email to Your Professor Handout

1. Use a clear subject line. The subject “Rhetorical Analysis Essay” would work a bit better than “heeeeelp!” (and much better than the unforgivable blank subject line).

2. Use a salutation and signature. Instead of jumping right into your message or saying “hey,” begin with a greeting like “Hello” or “Good afternoon,” and then address your professor by appropriate title and last name, such as “Prof. Xavier” or “Dr. Octavius.” (Though this can be tricky, depending on your teacher’s gender, rank and level of education, “Professor” is usually a safe bet for addressing a college teacher.) Similarly, instead of concluding with “Sent from my iPhone” or nothing at all, include a signature, such as “Best” or “Sincerely,” followed by your name.

3. Use standard punctuation, capitalization, spelling and grammar. Instead of writing “idk what 2 rite about in my paper can you help??” try something more like, “I am writing to ask about the topics you suggested in class yesterday.”

4. Do your part in solving what you need to solve. If you email to ask something you could look up yourself, you risk presenting yourself as less resourceful than you ought to be. But if you mention that you’ve already checked the syllabus, asked classmates and looked through old emails from the professor, then you present yourself as responsible and taking initiative. So, instead of asking, “What’s our homework for tonight?” you might write, “I looked through the syllabus and course website for this weekend’s assigned homework, but unfortunately I am unable to locate it.”

5. Be aware of concerns about entitlement. Rightly or wrongly, many professors feel that students “these days” have too strong a sense of entitlement. If you appear to demand help, shrug off absences or assume late work will be accepted without penalty because you have a good reason, your professors may see you as irresponsible or presumptuous. Even if it is true that “the printer wasn’t printing” and you “really need an A in this class,” your email will be more effective if you take responsibility: “I didn’t plan ahead well enough, and I accept whatever policies you have for late work.”

6. Add a touch of humanity. Some of the most effective emails are not strictly business -- not strictly about the syllabus, the grade, the absence or the assignment. While avoiding obvious flattery, you might comment on something said in class, share information regarding an event the professor might want to know about or pass on an article from your news feed that is relevant to the course. These sorts of flourishes, woven in gracefully, put a relational touch to the email, recognizing that professors are not just point keepers but people.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/04/16/advice-students-so-they-dont-sound-silly-emails-essay>