

Email Etiquette at University

Email communication has become a preferred method of professional communication and is an invaluable way to communicate with members of the university community. Email has different rules and expectations than other forms of communication (speaking, texting). Proper email etiquette can eliminate potential misunderstandings and project a professional manner. Effective emails are precise, use formal language, and are free of errors.

Basic Components of Email Etiquette

- Always use your UM email (username@myumanitoba.ca) or UM Learn to email your instructors and other university community members.
- Use the subject line to clearly state the purpose of the message.
- Address your instructors by their title and family name, and with a formal greeting (e.g. Dear Professor Smith).
- Include your full name, student number, class and section, as well as the day of the week and time of your class.
- Use a professional, easy to read font and size (e.g. Calibri, size 12).
- If you are attaching a file, specify this in the email. Ensure you attach the file before sending.
- Check your email for spelling and grammar errors before sending.
- Be patient in waiting for a response, as faculty, academic advisers, and other university contacts may not be able to reply immediately. If you do not receive a reply within five business days, you may send a polite email asking if your recipient received the initial message.
- Be sure to check your email regularly. Respond to any follow-up emails as soon as you can, and acknowledge that you have received an email.

Writing in an Appropriate Tone

- Strike a balance between formal and friendly, but avoid jokes which might be seen as unprofessional or inappropriate.
- Use proper spelling, grammar, and capitalization.
 - USING FULL CAPITALIZATION often comes across as yelling.
 - Avoid abbreviations, especially those used in text messages (e.g. “u” instead of “you”)
- While using emoticons (e.g. smiley faces) can relieve potential misunderstanding in an email, they can come across as casual and are not appropriate for formal messages.
- Use clear and precise language in your email.
 - “Can we meet Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. in 201 Tier to discuss my essay structure?”
- If you are raising a concern, be positive and calm.
 - Give yourself time to reflect on the matter. You might regret sending something while you are upset. If replying to an email from which you have taken offense, do not respond in the same perceived tone. Be calm and patient in your reply, or address the topic in person.
 - Clearly explain the history of the problem and what steps you have already taken.
 - Offer suggestions for how the problem can be resolved and what action or outcome you might hope for from your reader.

Should you send that email?

While sending an email might be the quickest way to address a topic, there are some points to consider when deciding to email, as some topics might be better discussed in person. Before you send an email query, check if the information you are seeking is already available on a syllabus or department website.

- In an email:
 - You have a short or easy question such as clarifying deadlines, assignment details, or specific concepts from class. You should avoid asking for a summary of what was covered in a missed class.
 - You are submitting an assignment, for which you were given permission.
- In person:
 - If your topic or question is complicated and will likely require a back-and-forth discussion, meeting in-person is better.
 - Speaking face-to-face about a potentially sensitive topic can help avoid misunderstandings arising out of email communication.
 - If your email is too long and is taking too long to write, consider making an appointment to meet in-person.

Sample Email

You can use this email as a model for drafting messages.

Subject: (Course Number): Request for Meeting

Dear Professor Smith,

My name is (insert your full name) and my student number is (XXXXXXX). I am a student in ARTS 1110 A03 Tuesday/Thursdays at 8:30am. Can we meet this Tuesday at 9:30 a.m. in 201 Tier to discuss my essay structure?

Thank you.

Sincerely,
(Insert full name)

Sources

- “E-mail Etiquette,” UBC Learning Commons, University of British Columbia, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://learningcommons.ubc.ca/student-toolkits/interacting-with-profs/e-mail-etiquette/>
- “Email Etiquette for Students,” Purdue Online Writing Lab, accessed November 26, 2019, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/academic_writing/email_etiquette_for_students.html
- “Netiquette,” FGSR Professional Development, University of Alberta, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://cloudfront.ualberta.ca/-/media/gradstudies/professional-development/pd-resources/profpracnetiquette.pdf>
- A. K. Turnage (2007), “Email flaming behaviors and organizational conflict,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), 43-59.