

When is it appropriate to send an email?

- ✚ When you need to relay a short amount of information quickly
- ✚ When the reply can be as brief as the original message
- ✚ When you need to get in touch with someone you don't see on a daily basis
- ✚ When you need to set up a meeting or make an appointment

When is it better to have a conversation in person?

- ✚ When you have a significant request to make:
 - Asking a professor to be your advisor
 - Asking a professor to be on your exam or dissertation committee
 - Asking for a letter of recommendation
- ✚ When you have a sensitive issue to discuss:
 - Email is not entirely secure, and confidential information could be accessed by others if it is stored in your email. This might include:
 - Students who want to discuss their grades
 - When you catch a student committing academic dishonesty
 - Issues of discrimination
 - Make appointment to discuss these matters in person, and then send a follow-up email—*without the confidential details*—so that there is a record of what took place.

The first thing to ask yourself when composing an email is who your audience is. You likely will be writing to someone in one of these four groups:

- ✚ Your professors
- ✚ Your students
- ✚ Your colleagues
- ✚ People you do not know, but would like to work with in some capacity

No matter which group you are writing to, the same basic rules will often apply: you must be professional. That generally means you should:

- ✚ Send messages from your nd.edu address, or from another respectable email address
 - The address should be your name, and not something like “footballfan75”
 - Make sure that the name used for the address itself, and which you use as the ‘from’ identifier is your name in the form that your professors will be used to seeing it—do not use nicknames, or it will be harder to figure out who has sent the email. You may need to go into your account settings or talk to someone at the OIT Helpdesk to change this.
- ✚ Do not use abbreviations or ‘netspeak’ (such as writing “How r u” instead of “How are you”)
- ✚ Do not use emoticons
- ✚ Do not use more lax grammar; punctuate and capitalize as though you were writing a letter

These things may be fine when you are writing to family or close friends, but in general, you want to present yourself as professionally as possible.

Every email should have a subject line—never send a message without one! It tells your audience what to expect in the message itself. Your subject line should be a brief and specific description of your reason for writing. For example:

- ✚ “Request for help with Chemistry 500” rather than “Please help me”
- ✚ “Apology for Class Absence 4/18” rather than “Absence”
- ✚ “Reminder—Paper 2 Due 3/15” rather than “Assignment reminder”

How do you address people when you begin your email? How should you sign it? These little details can cause a lot of anxiety—here are some general guidelines to follow:

- ✚ When addressing your professors, use formal language and call them by the title they have earned:
 - Dear Professor _____,
 - Dear Dr. _____,
 - Dear Matt, (ONLY after your professor has indicated that you may address him or her by first name!)
- ✚ When writing to your students:
 - Dear Jessica,
 - Dear Tim,
- ✚ When addressing your colleagues:
 - Dear Emma,
 - Hi, Mark, (for people whom you know)
- ✚ When writing to people you do not know, the same basic rules apply, but you may need to do some research first. Look around their department website to find out what title you should use, and always choose the most polite form of address:
 - Dear Professor _____,
 - Dear Dr. _____,
 - Dear Mr./Ms. _____,
- ✚ When signing emails addressed to your professors, use your full name if you do not know them well (this rule goes for people whom you do not know but wish to work with in some way); if you do know them well, you can stick with your first name
- ✚ When signing emails to your students, sign them with the name you want them to call you by:
 - For example: Professor _____
- ✚ What should you write before your name? There are many options; these are only some of the choices, but are all safe choices:
 - Thank you,
 - Thanks very much,
 - Sincerely,
 - Best [wishes]
 - Cheers,
 - Regards,

There are some general precautions you will want to take before you hit ‘send’:

- ✚ Proofread for spelling, concise sentences, and complete ideas
- ✚ For important emails, you might have a friend (or sometimes even your advisor) read the message first

- ✚ Tone can be easily misunderstood via email, so be as clear as possible
 - If you receive an email that upsets you, it may be a difficulty in expressing tone. Wait a bit before you respond.
- ✚ Make sure to hit 'reply' rather than 'reply to all' unless you are **absolutely certain** that you want to send a response to every single person in the address/cc fields.
 - Keep an eye out for when you're responding to a mailing list!
- ✚ When writing a very important message, write the address in last. That way you can't send the message before you are ready.
 - You can also write the actual message as a word document and then paste it into the body of the email.
- ✚ Consider saving important emails as a draft for a day, and then editing them again before you hit 'send'.

What should your email content look like?

- ✚ Get to the point! State your reason for writing as clearly as possible, and don't include unnecessary information
- ✚ Indicate what response you expect: whether, for example, you would like an answer to a question, or to schedule an appointment.
- ✚ Put your information in a sensible order.

After you send your email, don't expect an immediate reply.

- ✚ You never know what schedule the recipient has, so give them a week to respond.
- ✚ If you do not receive a response after a week, you can send a polite reminder.
- ✚ If, however, you still receive no response a week after sending the reminder, you will have to give up.
 - An exception: if your advisor has promised to do something (send you comments, write you a recommendation), you might schedule a meeting with them and **very** politely ask in person.

So, how do you show respect via email? Without facial expression or tone, it can be hard to convey, so you must find another way.

- ✚ Acknowledge that you know the recipient is busy, and you respect their time
- ✚ Do not ask for too much
- ✚ When asking for a favor, give professors an option to say no.
- ✚ Provide possible solutions to problems
- ✚ Make requests far in advance of your deadlines. Some general guidelines (if your professors specify another timeline for requests, follow theirs!):
 - Written work (conference or journal submissions, dissertation chapters): at least two weeks in advance; more during busy times of the academic year.
 - Letters of recommendation: at least two weeks in advance
 - Reminders to students: a day or two in advance
- ✚ Make requests politely, rather than sounding demanding:
 - "Please" can help, but sometimes it sounds pushy: "Please send me X by tomorrow" is fine if you are reminding students to hold to a deadline, but not when asking professors for something.

- Use modals (like “would,” “could”), and expressions of possibility. For example:
 - ✚ Would it be possible for you to send me X tomorrow?
 - ✚ If you have the chance, could you send me X?

Emails scheduling meetings have their own set of rules that you will want to follow in order to show respect.

- ✚ Schedule meetings a few days in advance whenever possible.
 - Pre-set office hours are an exception, but can be busy
- ✚ Let your professor know when you are available. Give them dates and times.
- ✚ Avoid using less-specific terms like ‘today’ or ‘tomorrow’—you do not know when your professor will see the email.
 - Instead, give specific days and times like “Wednesday, the 26th.”

But, don’t go overboard! You don’t have to grovel, or completely erase yourself and your concerns from your request. Something overly polite, or giving too much information winds up sounding absurd. For example:

- ✚ **DO NOT WRITE:** “Dear Professor _____, I was hoping that I could meet with you to discuss my paper for your extremely interesting class. I know your brilliant and insightful comments will make the paper so much better. No one else can possibly help me. I can meet with you any time. I will rearrange my schedule if necessary.”
- ✚ **INSTEAD, DO WRITE:** “Dear Professor _____, I was wondering if I could meet with you to discuss my paper for your class. I have written a draft, and, if you have the time, I would appreciate your thoughts on my approach or argument. I am available on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons, and all day on Tuesday and Thursday, and can meet with you at your convenience. Thank you.”

Finally, what should you do when you need to apologize to someone via email? First make sure you actually need to write an apology. It is necessary to write an email when you:

- ✚ Cannot meet a deadline
- ✚ Need to reschedule an appointment
- ✚ Miss a meeting

What information should be included in an apology?

- ✚ Only what is necessary for the reader to know
- ✚ When you are sick, for example, do not include the details
- ✚ Indicate how you are going to solve the problem

There are set ways of beginning apology phrases:

- ✚ I’m sorry about ...
- ✚ I’m sorry for ...
- ✚ I’m sorry that ...
- ✚ I’m sorry to ...

- ✚ I apologize for ...
- ✚ I apologize that ...

An email apologizing for something will usually follow the following format:

- ✚ Terms of address (Dear _____,) and greeting.
- ✚ Apology statement
- ✚ Explanation of, or excuse for, the thing being apologized for
- ✚ Plan for fixing the situation
- ✚ Final apology sentence and signature.