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## Writing Email at University

What does an excellent email at university look like?

Email is the standard way of communicating with professors, professional staff, and other members of the university community. As a university student, it's important to develop skills in writing effective and professional emails.

Becoming an excellent email writer will help you:

1. Get results in the form of timely, accurate responses.
2. Create relationships and strengthen credibility.
3. Build transferable communication skills you'll use in the rest of life, including in the workplace.

The university will send important notices and updates to your Laurier email account, so it's good to develop a habit of checking your email at least once a day. As a rule, use only your Laurier email account to correspond with professors and other university employees; external email addresses may be flagged as spam.

Let's look an example. You can use the following template when writing email to professors.

### Example email

Subject: XX101 response paper ***[use a concise and specific subject line]***

Hello Professor [X] ***[begin with a formal, accurate greeting],***

I hope this email finds you well ***[open with a courteous statement].***

I am writing regarding our XX101 course ***[immediately declare the purpose of writing].*** I am wondering/have a question/would like to clarify [X]. I have looked at the syllabus and talked to a peer in our course, but I am still wondering about [X] ***[indicate what you have already done to try to answer the question or solve the problem yourself].*** Could you please help me by [X] ***[specifically state what you would like the professor to do]?***

With thanks ***[sign off with thanks],***

Your name

### Subject lines

First, consider subject lines carefully. Use a short, specific subject line, emphasizing action to be taken when relevant. For instance, let's look at several subject lines that you may receive as a student:

- Study group discussion follow-up
- AF105 Presentation feedback
- Research notes

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- REVISED: Monday tutorial location
  - RSVP: Student association social
  - Winter term registration dates

Which email do you think you would open first?

It's likely that you'll probably gravitate towards one of the emails with the subject line of "AF105 Presentation Feedback" or "REVISED: Monday tutorial location" before clicking on the others. These emails have a very clear connection to you and clearly indicate that there is information you need to know contained within them. This sort of information also works for university staff and professors! For example, course instructors will naturally gravitate to a subject line like "AF105 Presentation: Question on Thesis Statement" over a subject line like "Thesis?"

Now that you have an **action-oriented subject line**, the body of the email comes next!

## Five key qualities of a professional email

### 1. Concision

- The email should get to the main point immediately, and express ideas in concise terms.
- The first or second sentence should explicitly state what the message is about: "I am writing to . . ."
- If you find you are writing more than five sentences in an email, it's a good sign that another form of communication is better, such as attending office hours.

### 2. A polite, professional tone

- The email should be written using polite and formal language.
- Indicate tone by using politeness markers, including "please," "thank you," and "I appreciate it."
- Employ soft verbs and pose questions to communicate willingness to collaborate and compromise, such as "Would that work for you?"

### 3. Grammatically sound writing

- The email should be written in complete sentences and free from error.
- Emails with multiple errors undermine the credibility of the sender and can even look like spam.

### 4. An appropriate greeting and a salutation

- Double check the email address, the spelling of the addressee's name, and the addressee's title.
- If you are unsure of how to address a course instructor, "Professor [last name]" is a courteous way to address all course instructors at North American institutions. It is unprofessional to refer to a professor by their first name or use gendered titles like "Miss."

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- An appropriate greeting includes “Hi” or “Hello,” but never “Hey,” which is too informal for business communication.
  - A proper salutation could be “Thank you,” “Sincerely,” “Regards,” or “Best.” Avoid instructing the recipient to get back to you as soon as possible.
  - Consider setting up an email signature with your full name, program, and student number. Not only does a signature provide important information, but it also looks professional and gives you credibility, so you’re likely to get a faster response. You can get started in setting up a signature in Outlook by going to “Settings” and then searching the terms “email signature” in the dialogue box.

## 5. Consideration of the needs of the reader

- Identify yourself to people who don’t know you, and provide context for why you are writing.
- Break the text into chunks for ease of reading.
- Consider timing when sending emails: writing a professor at 3:00am to request an extension makes you appear disorganized and unprofessional. Draft but don’t send email outside of normal business hours (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm); you can also schedule emails to be sent later.
- Wait for a response; the recipient will reply to you when they have time. Do not send repeated emails requesting a reply or expect responses over holidays or on weekends.
- If a professor includes an email policy on the syllabus, ensure you familiarize yourself with it.