Email Etiquette for Professors

For younger students entering college, sending emails to professors can be an intimidating task. A professor's responsibilities range from having to do lecture and research to attending conferences and group meetings. Subsequently, professors are extremely busy and don't have much excess time to spend reading emails. As a students it should be your goal to compose clear, professional, and concise emails. This instructional video is a 6-step guide to composing such emails.

Step 1: Use an appropriate email account. Use your college or university email account. You want to avoid confusing your professor; using your university's email address is appropriate and expected. This also guarantees that your message won't get filtered into the spam folder. Pleas refrain from using email addresses such as I_so_sexy@hotmail.com and the other email addresses below.

Step 2: An informative subject line. The subject line is the first part of your email that will be seen by your professor. Try to make the subject line clear and concise, avoid using vague language like question on homework, or ATTN: need advice IMMEDIATELY!!! Rather, try using more specific pharses such as question regarding homework number 11, or request: meeting for scheduling spring 2013 classes. If your email is regarding a one-sentence question, consider just placing it in the subject line, then your professor can get the information they need without needing to open your email. Oftentimes, professors teach more than just one class, this is especially true for those teaching large introductory courses with a large number of sections, in this case it is a good idea to precede the subject text with the relevant course and section number as well as the class time.

Step 3: Proper salutation. Avoid beginning with the word dear; this is an email not a letter. Rather, try starting with hello Professor Robinett, it's clean and simple. Also, refrain form beginning your email with heyyyyy!! Or YO! This is unprofessional and you may come off as overly informal. When addressing your professor, make sure you use their proper title and spell their name correctly, you can find this information on the university website. Sometimes it is difficult to find the proper title for the professor. If this is the case, refer to them as professor, as this avoids issues regarding martial status or the highest degree they've obtained.

Step 4: Formatting the body. Professors are usually pressed for time and don't particularly enjoy being emailed, keep this in mind as you are constructing your email. For example, if you needed to ask a few questions about your homework, get to the point. Start your email by stating your problem clearly and concisely. For example, consider the following email regarding questions about homework #11. You want to avoid superfluous introductions; this paragraph is unnecessary and should be deleted. It would be better to get to the point and begin with the next paragraph. Although this paragraph is a better starting point, the presentation of the information could be improved. To improve the readability, it would be best to make an explicit numbered list for the questions. Notice how this condensed numbered example get the message across quickly and clearly. Before closing your email, be sure to express gratitude, make it clear to your professor that you really appreciate them taking time out of their day to help you out.

Step 5: Closing the email. At the close of your email, it is generally expected that you include a valediction like sincerely, or regards, either of those are acceptable. A simple thanks works fine too. After that, be sure to write out your full name; even if you're on a first name basis with your professor, it is important that there is absolutely no confusion regarding your identity. Beneath your name it is always a good idea to include your contact information, as well as your college and major.

Step 6: proofreading your email. After you have finally completed your email, you should to proofread the message. Keep a lookout for incomplete sentences, correct grammar and spelling errors. Texting abbreviation such as idk or lol are not acceptable in a professional email. In addition to looking for grammatical errors, you should also be aware of your email's format. If your email contains a lot of text, paragraph chunking is great technique in creating an attractive presentation. To chunk your information, create a line of white space between your texts where you have topic changes. This makes your email easier to read and your professor won't feel so overwhelmed with your message. After you have proof read your email, you are now prepared to hit the send button. And whala! You have sent your professional email.

Now that you have sent your professional email, here is some additional information to take into consideration. It is important to realize that you must allow adequate amount of time for your professor to reply to your email. Many professors only check their emails once per day; therefore, you can expect at least a one-day delay in receiving a reply.

You are now ready to create professional emails to send to your college professors. Your newly acquired knowledge of email etiquette ensures your success in crating efficient and clean emails that elicit timely responses from your professor. Good luck and happy emailing!