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Writing Emails Graciously

For most high school students in China, we are accustomed to use the Instant Messaging Software such as Wechat and QQ to contact with each other. It is not until I enter a university that I realize the wide usage of email in communicating with professors, posting announcement, submitting files and suchlike. Therefore, a clear expression of one's need and the appropriate email etiquette are attached to great importance. After carefully reading a series of emails from students in Illinois 2007, in this paper, my analysis focuses on the similarities and differences between emails from Guy Joe(4) and Oliver(8), discussing how the ways in which students write their emails affect the results they may get.

Both Guy and Oliver wrote their email to explain their absence from class and asked for a delay of the paper submission. They have the same reason, being sick, and both have a clear goal. They apologize for their absence and come up with a make-up plan by saying "I could give you my homework and note on Wednesday if you would like"(4) and "I will get you my paper on Wednesday for class"(8). This suggests that both of Guy and Oliver are genuinely concerned for their course. However, they wrote their email in different styles, which will definitely give a different feeling to Professor Holguin and possibly leads to different results.

There is a distinct difference in the tone of two emails. Although Guy's email seems to be polite at first glance with "please", it is a little bit stiff when being read carefully. The expression "I wanted to let you know....." and "Please let me know....." is not appropriate in the relationship between a professor and a student and is more like a supervisor talking to his subordinate. However, it is more comfortable to read Oliver's email because of the expression "really sorry again" and "if possible". To write an email graciously, it is more proper to stay modest than to be condescending when talking to

our professor.

The pattern of the text of the two emails is also interestingly different. In Guy's email, there is a repetition of "I ... I ... I ..." while in Oliver's email there is a variation in sentence structure. The repetition of "I..." not only gives me a sense of pressure, but also indicates Guy has a strong sense of self. Too much emphasis on one's own thought and the neglect of the reader's feeling will easily lead to the reduction of favorability. For a gracious email, we should take readers' feeling into account as well as state our own situation.

As for the content itself, using concrete words instead of abstract words enhances the confidence level. Guy's words are specific such as "Strep throat" and "Mckinley", which indicates that he is honest and not lying. However, Oliver's words are vaguer such as "a little better" and "pretty sick". These "muddy" words, just as what Professor Holguin said, appear frequently in lies, thus heighten the chances to be suspected. Therefore, we should be franker and provide more concrete details in emails. But in consideration of readers, do not go too far and remember to avoid too much information of the sickness.

The time you ask for leave also shows your attitude. Whether your email is sent before or after the absence indicates your sincerity. Guy sent his email after his absence while Oliver sent his email before. Although falling ill is unpredictable, it is always better to ask for leave in advance, so that your professor will not be too worried about you and may help her adjust her plan. The longer window of time is given for adjustment and changes, the easier one's request will be satisfied.

In terms of the general feeling brought to the readers, I argue that Oliver is more probably to get what he want and leave a better impression on professor Holguin. But both of them have advantages and disadvantages. To put it in a nut shell, if we want to write an email graciously and increase the possibility to get what we want, not only should we state our reason and request clearly, but we should also put ourselves in reader's shoes, paying attention to the tone, pattern, content and time. That is to say, be modest, be varied, be frank and in advance.

Works Cited

Guy Joe. "Email Four." Message to Professor Holguin. 5 Nov. 2007. TS. Email.

George. "Email Nine." Message to Professor Holguin. 12 Nov. 2007. TS. Email