



Cold Emails & Informational Interviews

March 2025 – Anna Baidar, Gabriel Solis, Ben Graham

Cold emailing is a powerful tool for making professional connections, whether in academia or industry. At its core, it's about reaching out to someone you don't know to express genuine interest in their work and explore potential opportunities for learning or collaboration. While it can feel intimidating at first, mastering the art of cold emailing opens doors to mentorship, research opportunities, and career growth.

And don't forget, you're an interesting person to talk to. Big whig professionals miss being you. They want to talk to you. The very fact you are reaching out to them is flattering. So reach out with confidence!

In this guide, I'll share the strategies I use to reach out to faculty—both at my own institution and beyond—along with best practices that apply to cold emailing in both academic and professional settings.

Cold Emailing a Faculty Member

1. Identify the Person of Interest (POI):

- a. Ask yourself:
 - i. Are you curious about their work and want to deepen your understanding?
 - ii. Are you hoping to receive their guidance in navigating academic and professional scenarios that are unfamiliar to you but commonplace for them?
 - iii. Are you interested in building on their current work in some way?
 - iv. Are you looking for broad or specific advice on how to break into or advance in their field?

If any of these apply—congrats! **You should cold email them.**

2. Research the POI:

- a. Review their:
 - i. Personal website or LinkedIn
 - ii. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
 - iii. Google Scholar profile (if they're an academic)

3. Take Notes:

- a. If they're an academic, look at their published work.
 - i. Read at least 4 abstracts. Skim at least 2 papers.
 - ii. This will help you draft an informed email and be well-prepared for a potential meeting.

- iii. Reference the empirical and/or theoretical notes guide drafted by Dr. Benjamin Graham, which we have linked [here](#).
 - b. If they're not an academic, spend a little time reading what you can find about them, and about their organization.
- 4. Draft the Email:**
- a. Be respectful of the POI's time.
 - b. Include:
 - i. **An introduction** – Introduce yourself and explain your interest in their work.
 - ii. **Reference their work** – Mention 2-3 of their papers and what you liked about them. Or something you think is cool about them or the org they work for.
 - iii. **A meeting request** – Ask if they are available for a **20-minute** meeting sometime in the next few weeks.
 - iv. **Availability** – Provide several time slots when you are available, spread over several days.
 - v. **A closing statement** – Thank them for their time.
- 5. Get Feedback on Your Draft**
- a. If it is your first time cold emailing – we recommend:
 - i. Running it through an AI model to check for spelling and grammatical errors.
 - ii. Sending it to a mentor you trust to double-check the tone, content, and general etiquette of the email and implementing the feedback you receive.

Follow-Up & Meeting Etiquette

- 1. If You Do Not Receive a Response:**
- a. Wait a week.
 - b. If no reply, send a polite follow-up email. Ben likes the phrase, “gently bump this up in your inbox.”
 - c. If you still don't receive a response, don't stress! People are often busy and your email may have been buried, or they simply didn't have the bandwidth to respond.
 - i. This does not reflect on you—unless, of course, you sent a particularly egregious email. (Kidding!)
- 2. If They Agree to Meet:**
- a. You **MUST** create and share a calendar invite, which should include a Zoom link or a phone number (or you can go meet them in person at their office!).
 - i. Google calendar does a pretty good job at this
 - ii. **DO NOT BE LATE TO THE MEETING.**
- 3. Meeting Preparation:**
- a. **Ensure your webcam is clean**—wipe it down to avoid a blurry or dirty image.

- b. **Check your meeting platform** (Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, etc.) ahead of time to avoid technical difficulties.
 - c. Have a professional background, or set up a Zoom background. Dress business casual.
- 4. Meeting Etiquette:**
 - a. **Thank them**
 - i. Express appreciation for their time and acknowledge their busy schedule.
 - ii. Confirm the agreed meeting length and when you plan to wrap up.
 - b. **Introduce yourself**
 - i. Give a brief summary of who you are and why you're interested in their work.
 - ii. **Example:** – "It's nice to meet you! My name is XX, and I'm a current undergraduate student at USC. I recently read some of your work on [topic], and I had a few questions I'd love to ask you about it."
 - 1. If the conversation goes well, they may naturally ask more about your background, research interests, or future plans.
- 5. Handling Nerves:**
 - a. If you feel nervous, try to reframe the interaction—think of it as a casual conversation with a new neighbor, a friend's parent, or a stranger at the grocery store.
 - i. **Reminder:** Academics – they're just like us!
 - b. Maintaining eye contact – Pro tip from Gabriel Solis:
 - i. Place a sticky note near your webcam and focus on that to create the illusion of eye contact without discomfort.
- 6. Meeting Content:**
 - a. Have your notes and relevant papers pulled up in a separate tab for easy reference.
 - i. Prepare a list of thoughtful, non-Googleable questions.
 - ii. Prioritize 3-5 strong questions to guide the conversation
 - b. Time Management:
 - i. Track the time and be mindful of the agreed meeting length.
 - ii. Give a heads-up when **you're halfway through** and again as you **near the end**.
 - iii. **Respect their time**—going over may discourage future meetings.
- 7. Wrapping Up:**
 - a. Express gratitude again.
 - b. If you'd like to meet again, politely ask if they'd be open to another conversation in the coming weeks.
 - i. Offer to follow up to coordinate scheduling.
 - ii. Send a brief thank-you email afterward.
 - c. If requesting another meeting, follow up 24 hours later based on their availability.

Cold Emailing for Industry

- 1. Industry is a bit different than academia, but you can still follow these same general guidelines.

- a. Instead of email you could also reach out via LinkedIn!

Good luck!