

8 Tips for Writing Effective Cold Emails

Now that we know who to email and how to get their email, what do we actually say in the email? Here are 8 quick tips for writing effective emails.

Tip #1: Keep the Email Short

Recruiters are busy people, as we covered in depth in Chapter 1 on resumes. Just like with your resume, they don't have a lot of time to read your email. You've got 10 seconds to impress them with your email so that they respond to it rather than ignore it. So keep your email short.

The data backs email brevity. HubSpot analyzed 40 million emails and found the ideal length of a cold sales email is between 50 and 125 words to maximize response rates. I've personally had the best luck at around 100 words. It's all about maintaining a high signal-to-noise ratio. You don't need to include phrases like "I hope you are doing well today!" or "I hope this email finds you well." At best, it's extraneous and at worst, insincere.

Tip #2: Mention an Accomplishment or Two

Our cold email is just like a sales email. In one paragraph, you are trying to sell yourself to the recruiter as someone worthy of an interview. This is sales — don't be shy.

Highlight a relevant accomplishment or internship experience that makes you worthy of a response. Name-drop that hackathon you won. Hypertext to your favorite project or an app on the app store with a few thousand downloads and mention that usage number. If you went to an impressive engineering school, lean into that.

However, you don't need to link to too many things or copy-paste the entire resume. That would end up breaking Principle #1: Keep It Short. Instead, attach your resume to the initial email so the recruiter can get more background if needed.

Tip #3: Add Urgency and Establish a Timeline

My favorite tip: if you already have a return internship offer with a different company or a competing job offer extended to you, mention that. It puts pressure on a recruiter to respond promptly and might even fast-track you to an onsite interview. This tactic works especially well if it's an offer with a well-known company.

Even if the deadline is very far from now, so there is no true urgency, name-dropping the other company is helpful as social proof. If other companies desire you, then a recruiter is more likely to feel you are valuable and have #fomo. This leads to them responding to you.

You don't even need the offer in hand to make this tactic work! Just having an onsite interview scheduled with a top company helps other companies realize you've got something worthwhile and that there is a specific timeline to adhere to.

Sample Cold Message Only if I have interview elsewhere:

Subject: Former Microsoft Intern With Upcoming Deadline Interested in Uber ATG

Hello Recruiter Name,

I have an upcoming onsite-interview with Microsoft's Azure ML team next month, but wanted to also interview with Uber because self-driving cars is where I believe Computer Vision will help improve the world the most in the next decade.

Helping the world through CV became my passion after seeing the impact of the last project I made, which used CV to find and categorize skin diseases.

From reading the ATG engineering blogs, I know Uber is the best place for a passionate computer vision engineer to make an impact, and am eager to start the interview process before I go too far down the process with Microsoft.

I've attached my resume.

Thanks,

Nick Singh

****WARNING**** Be careful not to make it seem like the company you are talking to is the backup option. To do this, make sure you convey enthusiasm for the company and mission. Below is an example of that.

Tip #4: Relate Personally to the Recruiter or Company

Yes, this is a cold email, but you don't have to be so cold! The person at the other end of the email is still a human and you can make a real-life connection even if you haven't met before. It's well worth it to do your research. For example, see if you have a mutual connection with the recruiter. Use LinkedIn to see if you have any commonalities like education or cities you've both lived in. Even two minutes of sleuthing on the internet looking for a commonality can pay huge dividends when it comes to response rates.

Tip #5: Have a Specific Ask

Be up front with what you want. A vague email hoping to "set up a time to chat" or "learn more about the interview process" is too meek and indirect. The recruiter knows that between your Google Search, Quora, and Glassdoor, you can find any information you need about a company and the interview process. They undoubtedly know you are angling for a job or internship but are too shy to ask directly.

So why not be bold — after all, fortune favors the bold — and always include a specific ask:

"I'd like to interview for a Data Science Internship for Summer 2021."

"I'd like to start the interview process for the Senior Data Scientist position at your company."

Tip #6: Have a Strong Email Subject Line

An email is only read if it's opened. Without a strong subject line to lure the recipient into actually opening the email, the email is wasted. Thus, it's worth spending time crafting a strong email subject line. To make the subject line click-worthy, it's key to include your most noteworthy details. It's okay if the subject line is keyword driven and a "big flex," as the teens say these days. Borrow from BuzzFeed clickbait tactics like "This

Data Scientist's Resume Has 7 Weird Facts That'll Leave You DYING to Hire — they actually work! I wouldn't go so far as to say "21 days. What I (Nick) used, for example: "Former Google & Microsoft Intern Interested in FT @ X"

This subject line works because I lead immediately with my background, which is click-worthy since Google and Microsoft are well-known companies, and I have my specific ask (for full-time software jobs) included in the subject line. Some other subject line examples that are short and to the point if you can't rely on internship experience at name-brand companies:

"Computer Vision Math Major Ph.D. Interested In Waymo" "Princeton Math Major Interested in Quant @ Goldman Sachs" "Kaggle Champion Interested in Airbnb DS" "UMich Junior & Past GE Intern Seeking Ford Data Science FT"

If I (Nick) found a recruiter from my alma mater (UVA), I'd be sure to include that in the subject line to show that it's personalized. For reaching out to UVA alumni, I'd throw in a "Wahoowa" (similarly, a "Go Bears" or "Roll Tide" if you went to Berkeley or Alabama, respectively). Including the name of the recruiter should also increase the click-through rate.

Example: "Dan | FinTech Hackathon Winner And Wahoowa Interested in Robinhood"

Another hack: including "Re:" in the subject line to make it look like they've already engaged in a conversation with you.

Tip #7: Follow Up 3 Times

A perfectly written email sent only once may not work. You should follow up at least three times. You can reply directly to the thread, so that the context from the first email remains clear.

Don't worry about feeling too pushy — it's standard in sales to reach out 3+ times. I know first hand not to give up too early: some of the cold emails that turned into interviews only got responses after the third email. Send the first follow-up after 3–4 days, and send the second follow-up 4–5 days later. Don't think putting in a 2-week delay will make you come across as more polite.

A free Gmail plugin like Boomerang, which will flag when an email hasn't been responded to in some time, can help to keep yourself accountable. There is also automatic email scheduling within MassApply so that you can follow up three times.

If after a few emails you don't get a response, reach out to another recruiter at the same company. It's okay to reach out to multiple people at a company that you want to work for. Trust me, it's not a weird thing to do. In enterprise sales lingo, reaching out to multiple people at your target company is called being "multi-threaded into an account," and it's a time-tested tactic.

Tip #8: Send the Email at the Right Time

We've all been guilty of getting an email, reading it, and waiting till later to respond to it. And then "later" never comes. That's why Principle #7 — following up three times — works so damn well.

But sending an email out at the right time can save you from having to bump up email. To maximize your reply rate, send the email when you think the reader is most likely to be free and in the mood to respond. That means no weekend emails. No emails on holidays or days people typically might take a long weekend. Figure out the time zone for the recruiter, and be sure to not send it after business hours.

I had the best luck emailing Silicon Valley recruiters at ~11:00 A.M. or 2 P.M. P.S.T. The psychology behind this is we've all felt ourselves counting down the minutes to lunch, aimlessly refreshing our email and Slack to pass the time. That's a great time to catch someone. Same with the after lunch lull.

The best days I found to send emails were Tuesday through Thursday. I avoided Mondays since that's the day many people have 1:1s or team meetings or have work they are catching up on from the weekend. On Fridays, many people might be on PTO, or even if they are in office, have some other kind of event like happy hour in the afternoon (or they've already mentally checked out before the weekend).

3 Successful Cold Email Examples

Here are some real cold emails I've sent in the job hunt. The text is exactly the same as what I sent, but I just re-created it to protect the recipient's name and email address.

These emails aren't perfect by any means, but generally follow the eight tips I've laid out above. Just remember: even sending a cold email that's bad puts you in the top decile of job seekers. Most people will never make an effort to personally write an email to someone they don't know, and then have the tenacity to follow up a few times. It's precisely why cold email works so well!

The 4 Sequence Email Drip to Periscope Data

Intro Email:

Subject: Ex-Google & Microsoft Intern Interested in Working FT at Periscope Data

Hi X,

Found your email on Hacker news. I'm a former Software Engineering Intern @ Google's Nest Labs and Microsoft who will be graduating from college May'17.

I'm interested in working full time at Periscope Data because of my interest in data engineering (spent the summer on the Data Infrastructure team @ Nest) and my interest in turning data into insights (built dashboards to do just that the past two summers).

How can I start the interview process?

Best,

Nick Singh

My Two Follow-Ups:

Hi X,

Just wanted to follow up with you about full-time roles at Periscope data. I believe my interest in data engineering, along with past experience building dashboards and visualization tools, makes me a good fit.

The Hail Mary: I send this email when I have on-site interviews near the target company planned, or when I have offer deadline approaching. This email is often sent weeks after the initial outreach. It works because it adds an element of urgency to the recruiter, and it gives social proof that other companies have vetted me enough to bring me on-site.

Hi X,

Just wanted to follow up with you regarding opportunities with Periscope Data. I will be in the bay area doing interviews with Facebook and Uber next week. Would love a chance to do a phone interview with Periscope Data this week to assess technical fit. If we are a good match, I'd be happy to swing by the office the following week for technical interviews while I am already in town.

Thanks,
Nick Singh

More Examples of Real Cold Emails I've Sent

Cold Email to Airbnb in 2016:

Subject: Former Google Intern from UVA Interested in Airbnb

Hello X,

We met briefly at the UVA in SF mixer this past summer.

I just wanted to reach out to you about new grad Software Engineering positions @ Airbnb. My friend, Y, interned at Airbnb on the Infrastructure team and really loved their experience.

This past summer, I was on the Data Infrastructure team at Google's Nest Labs. From talking to Y, I think I can be a good fit for similar teams at Airbnb. Let me know what the next steps are.

Thanks,
Nick Singh

Cold Email to Reddit in 2015:

Hello X,

I saw your post on Hacker News and wanted to reach out regarding why I'm a good fit to be a Software Engineering intern at Reddit for Summer 2016.

I interned at Microsoft this past summer on the Payments Team where I helped the team turn data into insight to diagnose payment issues faster.

In my free time (when I'm not on Reddit) I built RapStock.io which I grew to 2000 users. 1400 out of the 2000 users came from Reddit when we went viral so I have a soft spot for the community and product.

Let me know what next steps I should take.

Cold Email to SafeGraph in 2018 (how I got my last job): Below is the screenshot of the exact email I sent in summer of 2018 to SafeGraph CEO, Auren Hoffman. I decided to email the CEO directly, in addition to my AngelList application, due to my poor track record of hearing back from online job portals. Within 24 hours of sending this email, I had an interview booked with Auren and ended up working at SafeGraph for close to two years. That's the power of cold email!

By utilizing these cold email tips and taking inspiration from these cold-email examples, in conjunction with a strong resume and kick-ass portfolio projects, you're well on your way to landing more data science interviews. Now comes the next challenge of the data science job hunt: acing the behavioral interview.

Auren,

I'm super interested in the CoS role at Safe Graph. I applied on Angel list but figured I'd also shoot you an email.

I'm a good fit for the role because

1. I'm currently a Software Engineer on Facebook's Growth team. I'm data-driven to the max - all day either coding or cutting data to understand the impact of what I coded and the A/B tests I ran.
2. I'm a hustler. I ran a startup in college, which I grew to 2,000 MAU. I ran a DJ business in highschool, which taught me how to be a people person and also sell, I helped run the Venture Capital club (Virginia Venture Fund) & Entrepreneurship Group (HackCville) at my college.
3. I studied Systems Engineering in college, which is super similar to Industrial Engineering / OR (your major). I also studied Computer Science. I've taking classes on ML, Computer Vision, Stochastic Processes, Databases. I'd be able to understand the technical details of SafeGraph and the space we operate in very quickly.

I've attached my resume. I'd love to call or meet up in person to talk more about why I'm excited about SafeGraph.

Thanks,
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