How to contact professor and faculty staff

How to contact the professor and faculty staff

Contacting your professors is something you'll probably have to do frequently throughout college. Probably more often than you'd prefer. There's no need to be intimidated, but there are a few things you should keep in mind before reaching out.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that any email you send to your professor should be written with a professional tone. Remember, the person you're addressing has the ability to make a drastic impact on your education. Your professor, as an expert in their field, holds the key to the information you need and can even help point you in the right direction toward your future career.

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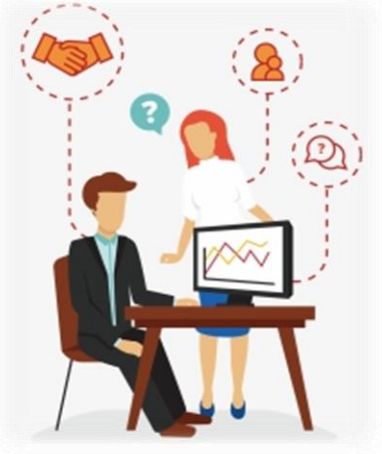

Use your University Email Address

Proper salutation

Make the subject line clear

Introduce yourself

Communicate clearly and precisely

Use correct grammar and spelling

Be Professional and polite

Use a formal closing

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Use your University Email Address

You have to contact your professors or faculty staff using a .edu email address or email account that only contains your names. Using your university email address makes your email look more professional and guarantees the email will make it through the university's spam filter. Your university email address also signals to the professor that you're one of their students so they will take your message more seriously.

Proper salutation

Address the professor as "Professor [Last Name]." Professors may sign emails with their initials or first name, but stick with "Professor" , if you're not sure what their proper title is, using "Professor" followed by their last name is almost always a safe bet. This might seem overly formal to you, but it is an important way to show respect for your professor and their position. Make sure to double check the spelling of their name before you hit send.

Tip: If you want to know their proper title, check the class syllabus!

Do NOT start your email with "Hey" or "Hi." Start your email with "Dear Professor X, …" or "Professor X, …".

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Make the subject line clear

Include a relevant subject line. Be sure that the subject line should be simple and reflect the content of your email. Something like“Question about [Class Name] paper” or “Meeting request” is appropriate.

Introduce yourself

Some professors have hundreds of students and may need some context to be able to place you and answer your question. This is especially true if you’re emailing them for the first time. If you do not know the professor or are enrolled in a large class with them, then easiest way to help them figure out who you are is by telling them which of their classes you’re in and which day your class meets (if it has multiple sections.)

It should be as simple as, “I’m a first-year in your PSYC 101 course.”

You can leave this part out if you are absolutely sure that your professor knows you by name.

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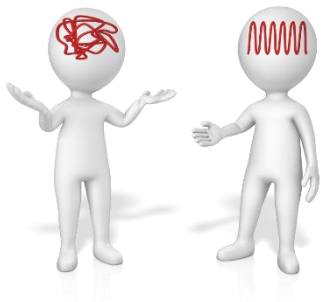

Communicate clearly and precisely

Professors get a lot of emails so make sure your request is simple and to the point. State your question clearly so your professor doesn't have to read the email multiple times to figure out what you want. You can also cut down on the number of emails required to answer your question by briefly listing the steps you have already taken to try and answer your question. These include things like checking the syllabus (a must before sending any professor an email), asking a classmate, and talking to the TA.

Use correct grammar and spelling

Edit your email. An email is not an essay, but check your spelling, grammar and syntax. Do not use texting slang or abbreviations.

Consider the flow of your email.

Avoid phrasing requests as demands. Emails that begin with the words "I need" are irksome. "Please" and "thank you" go a long way.

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Be Professional and polite

You and your professor have a professional relationship which should be reflected in your email to them. Do not use any emoji's. They have become a de rigueur form of communication, but they do not belong in a professional email.

You should also steer clear from including any unnecessary personal information in your email. If you missed a class, you don't need to go into details about why. Your personal life is not relevant to the professional relationship you have with your professor.

If you're asking a question you need an answer to, you can say something like "If you could let me know at your earliest convenience, I'd really appreciate it." If you need them to fill out a form, or contact someone on your behalf, or do something that requires more action than just answering your email, state that very clearly here. This helps them put it on their to-do list and get it done.

Use a formal closing

Conclude your email with a closing, such as "Best regards", "Sincerely", or "Thank you" followed by your name.

Tip: Set up a signature on your email account that include your full name, major, and expected graduation year.

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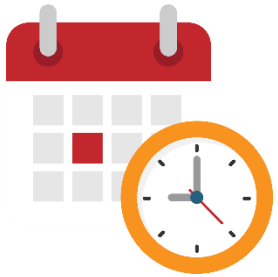
Follow up

Remember that your professors may have to keep track of hundreds of students at once. If your professor hasn't responded to your email, *you can send a polite follow-up*. You can format the follow-up using your previous email, but you can add *"Just following up on my previous email,"* right before. You don't have to point out that they forgot to respond to your email; they'll get the point (and if they genuinely forgot, they might feel bad).

Scheduling Meeting with Professors

The main things to keep in mind when asking for an appointment with your professor are to be polite and professional and keep his or her schedule and preferred methods of communication in mind.



To schedule a meeting with your professor, review your syllabus for specific instructions, send a polite and concise email, and/or ask respectfully before or after class.

The professor's office hours are usually listed on the syllabus as well. It is usually acceptable to "drop in" during the professor's office hours; however, it is courteous and professional to send an email first to request a meeting with the professor at a specific time during their office hours.

When setting up a meeting, mention what you want to talk about. This could be a general request such as "help organizing my essay" or a specific request such as "how to determine isotope ratios in Problem 3A on this week's homework." Providing this information shows the professor you are prepared, and perhaps the professor can effectively answer your question over email.

Best of luck