

Emails to academic staff tips and useful phrases

Cross off any tips below which are usually bad ideas.

Starting emails to academic staff tips

1. Use the same form of their name as you would face to face with that person
2. Use “Dear” + their job title/ position in the institution
3. If in doubt, use one level above what you imagine their actual position or qualifications would suggest
4. Make any friendly opening lines as specific as possible
5. Start with a very general thanking phrase
6. Start with a (very specific) mention of the last contact or communication between you and that person
7. Start with an apology
8. Directly mention which lecture you are attending to remind them of who you are
9. If you think they might have forgotten you, find an indirect way of making sure they know who you are

The main body of emails to academic staff

10. Use “Please (check my.../ look at.../...)”/ “Would you...?”/ “I’d like you to...”/ “I’m afraid I have to ask you to...”/ “I need you to...”/ “Thank you for your cooperation.” for polite requests
11. Mention any attachments or pasted in text
12. It’s good to include at least one more sentence after mentioning attachments
13. Give reasons for requests, delays, etc
14. Even if they asked you to send something, request that they look at it

Ending emails to academic staff tips

15. It’s usually best to include a closing line which is specific to the content of the email
16. It’s often good to mention the next contact or communication in the closing line

Brainstorm suitable phrases to do the good things or ways of doing something better than the bad things. (You only need to do this once for any pairs of tips above).

Can you think of any other similar tips or language for emails to professors etc?

Academic Writing Process tips

What advice would you give someone about the process of academic writing?

What stages are there? What orders could those stages go in?

At what stage(s) would you think about the title? What would that depend on?

What tips could you give about titles in different kinds of academic writing?

Suggested answers with bad ideas in italics

1. Use the same form of their name as you would face to face with that person – Usually better to go one level more polite, e.g. “Dear Dr Smith” if you say “John” in person
2. Use “Dear” + their job title/ position in the institution – “Dear teacher”, “Dear Doctor”, “Dear my teacher”, “Dear lecturer” etc are not standard English. If you really can’t find out their name, “Dear Professor” might be okay in the place of “Dear Sir or Madam”
3. If in doubt, use one level above what you imagine their actual position or qualifications would suggest – Dear Professor + family name, Dear Dr + family name
4. Make any friendly opening lines as specific as possible – I hope you enjoyed the trip which you told us about in the last lecture./ I hope you have recovered from your cold.
5. Start with a very general thanking phrase – better to be more specific, like those below
6. Start with a (very specific) mention of the last contact or communication between you and that person – Thanks for your lecture on..., which was very interesting./ Thank you for your email yesterday about the lecture that I missed.
7. Start with an apology – Not usually a good opening line, better as the second sentence or in the body of the email
8. Directly mention which lecture you are attending to remind them of who you are – Usually better to do the thing below
9. If you think they might have forgotten you, find an indirect way of making sure they know who you are – Thank you for your very interesting lecture about... on Wednesday afternoon./ Please find attached the homework task “Write about misconceptions in your field”, which is due by Friday.
10. Use “Please (check my.../ look at.../...)”/ “Would you...?”/ “I’d like you to...”/ “I’m afraid I have to ask you to...”/ “I need you to...”/ “Thank you for your cooperation.” for polite requests – None of these are requests, they are all commands/ orders, and are unsuitable however polite the language you use. Suitable requests phrases include “Could you (possibly)...?” and “Would it be okay for me to...?”
11. Mention any attachments or pasted in text – Please find... attached./ I have attached.../ Please see... below./ I’ve pasted in.../ The text in blue is...
12. It’s good to include at least one more sentence after mentioning attachments – It’s slightly over the word limit, but.../ If you have any problems reading it, please let me know./ I wasn’t sure which format was best, so I’ve included both PDF and...
13. Give reasons for requests, delays, etc – This is because.../ The main reason is...
14. Even if they asked you to send something, request that they look at it – This is actually heavier than more usual phrases like “I look forward to receiving your feedback.”/ “I hope it’s better than my last attempt.”/ “As requested, here is my...”/ “As per your instructions,...”/ “Following your instructions, I ...”
15. It’s usually best to include a closing line which is specific to the content of the email – Thanks again./ I hope that’s okay./ Please let me know if that might be okay./ I’ll write again with the finished document by Friday./ Thanks for your patience.
16. If often good to mention the next contact or communication in the closing line – See you in the tutorial on Friday./ I look forward to your next visit to our university./ I hope we have a chance to meet again at a symposium soon.