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# Emailing Professors

It's likely that you'll benefit from contacting a professor at least can have many concrete benefits:

to help you gain clarity on assignments, understand course content, to learn how to study in a particular course, or to build a relationship with your professor. However, unlike high school, college professors don't always have time to build strong personal relationships with all of their students, so students may feel uncomfortable or anxious about approaching or emailing them. While talking to or emailing your professor may feel intimidating, using a few effective strategies can help you calm your nerves and compose a clear, professional email.

This handout focuses on when and how to email your professor in order to strengthen (or build) your relationship and maximize your success in class.

## Reasons to email professors

There are many ways to communicate with professors, including during class, before or after class, in office hours, or via email. Every professor has different preferences and availability when it comes to communicating with students, and in most cases your syllabus will serve as a guide to the best approach. While there are some scenarios that may warrant an in-person conversation, there are other things that can easily be addressed via email. When you have a question or concern that you want to contact a professor about, consider which method best fits your situation.

### Scenarios that may be appropriate for email:

- Clarification on dates and deadlines
- Clarification on assignment or reading requirements
- Scheduling a meeting or office hours visit



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- Working through practice problems
- In-depth questions about course content

- Responding to an email from your professor that requires a response

## Situations that may be better to approach in-person:

- Going over an exam or a paper
- Discussing

## Tips for emailing professors

**Use your UTTC email address.** Save your other email accounts for use with friends and family.

**Use the subject line.** Write a brief and specific description of your purpose, such as “Question about lecture” and include the course number. Avoid making demands, such as “Immediate response needed.”

**Use a salutation.** The safest way to start is with “Dear Professor Jones.” This will avoid the issue of whether the professor has a PhD or not. Avoid being overly familiar (e.g., “Hey Professor”).

**Be concise.** Write concisely in the body of your email. Your message should be clear, organized, and brief.

**Capitalize, punctuate, and check your spelling.** You want to convey an impression as a serious student. This is not a post on Facebook or a text message.

**Acknowledge any and all replies.** If your professor answers your email, sends a handout, or agrees to write a reference, be sure to acknowledge this with a thank you in your reply.



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**Remember, email is forever.**

Once you send it off, you cannot get it back. Your professor owns it and can do with it what he or she wants (like forwarding it to others).

Things to avoid  
when emailing  
professors

**Don't embarrass yourself.** Remember to proofread for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization before you hit send.

**Don't ask a question if it's already been answered.** Before asking a question about an assignment, due date, or course policy, consult the syllabus and any course materials you have been given in class or on Sakai to see if you can find the answer there.

**Don't expect an immediate response.** Professors have different work schedules. Twenty-four hours is a standard window for an email response during the business week.

**Don't complain.** If you have a concern about a grade or course policy, it's usually best to have that conversation in person. Unless you have been specifically advised to use email for grading topics or issues, don't. Go to office hours and discuss grade questions face-to-face. If you do decide to express a concern via email, don't send your email immediately after drafting. Wait at least an hour and read again to check your tone, or ask a friend to read and give you feedback on how you might come across to your professor.