

How to Email Your Prof

Subject Line

- Be descriptive and informative: include the course, the assignment name, etc. Example: “REL 105 Exegetical Paper.”

Salutation

- If you know (for sure!) that the instructor likes students to use his or her first name, use the following formula: greeting word (e.g., *hello*, *hi*, *dear*) + instructor’s first name. Example: “Hi Liza, . . .” If you know the instructor prefers a more formal greeting, or if you’re not sure, use this formula: greeting word (e.g., *hello*, *hi*, *dear*) + honorific (e.g., *Dr.* or *Professor*) + instructor’s last name. Example: “Dear Dr. Singh, . . .” or “Hello Professor Wang, . . .”
- The greeting *hey* doesn’t sound very professional, so avoid it.
- When choosing an honorific, use *Dr.* if you know the instructor has a doctorate (PhD, DMin, EdD, etc.). Otherwise, use *Professor*. Avoid *Mr.* and *Ms.* unless your instructor has requested one of these titles.
- Do not simply say “Dear Professor.” If you use the honorific *Professor*, always include the instructor’s last name, too.

The First Sentence (or Two)

- Before you launch into your question or comment, take a moment to establish a human connection with your instructor. You can say something as simple as “I hope you’ve had a great day! I’ve been studying for my upcoming midterm, and I had a quick question about . . .” You can make a comment about class: e.g., “I enjoyed learning about X yesterday” or “I’ve been thinking about what you said in class about Y.” Other options may include “Thank you for meeting with me last week” or “I hope you survived that crazy snow storm last night!” Keep these sentences brief and polite, but do stop to make interpersonal contact.

The Body

- Next, explain the details of your question or comment briefly. Be sure to mention the course and assignment you have in mind.
- Show your instructor that you have already made an effort to answer the question. Where have you looked? Have you asked your classmates? a librarian? the writing centre? Based on the work you’ve done, what do you think the answer is? (If you have missed class, make sure you’ve borrowed and read through a classmate’s notes before asking your prof a question about class content.)
- Then state, simply and politely, what you’d like the instructor to do. Example: “Could you please confirm if this source is suitable for the assignment?” Be specific. If you’re setting up an appointment with the instructor, list a few times that would work for you, but also say that you’d be open to other possibilities.

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The Closing

- Say thank you, and then sign your name.

Sources

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Colleen Flaherty, “Re: Hellllllp!!!!,”

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Laura Portwood-Stacer, “How to Email Your Professor (without being annoying AF),”

<https://medium.com/@lportwoodstacer/how-to-email-your-professor-without-being-annoying-af-cf64ae0e4087>.

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