

Communicating and Building Relationships with Professors

Use the Right Terms

- When communicating with your professors, you should always use “Professor” or “Doctor (Dr.)” when addressing them.
- Do not use more informal ways to address your professors until they have given you permission to do so. Sometimes, professors will tell you “You can call me by my first name”, and only then is it okay to do so.
- When in doubt, follow the lead of your classmates. If everyone else is referring to your instructor as “Professor Jones”, you should do this as well.

Building Rapport with Professors

- Go to class, and arrive on time and prepared.
 - Bring all necessary books, notebooks, and materials for class. Arrive on time and in your seat and ready to learn at the start of class.
- Participate to show engagement and understanding of the material.
 - Raise your hand frequently to answer questions posed by the professor, comment on the topic, or ask questions. Keep your questions or comments relevant and on topic.
- Be alert and attentive in class even when you are not engaging
 - Professors notice when students are not engaged with material, not focused on what they are saying, or completing other tasks. Professors also notice when students are engaging with the material and following along. If there are certain things that help you to focus better (Example: doodling while listening to the lecture), relay that information to the professor. Over communicating is better than having a professor think that you are not taking their class seriously.
- Show your professor respect
 - Simple things like saying “hello” at the start of class and “thank you, goodbye” at the end of class let your professor know you appreciate them and their time.
- Keep in touch with your professors
 - If you have a professor you get along well with or that works or conducts research in an area you are interested in, it is good to keep in contact

through email or by meeting with them to discuss new and relevant coursework you are completing to get their take on it.

How to Email: Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Do send emails asking for clarification on an assignment, to request a meeting, or to ask for a letter of recommendation.
- Do send emails to professors from your school email.
- Do specify which class and section you are in, and thoroughly explain why you are emailing.
- Do give your professor at least 48 hours to respond to your email.
- Do send a follow up email if over 48 hours has passed (not counting weekends or holidays).

Don't

- Don't send an email asking questions that are answered in the syllabus or can be easily found in the coursework.
- Don't be informal. Avoid using slang or texting abbreviations. Avoid using all caps.
- Do not use email to vent about your frustrations with a class. If you are having an issue, set up a time to meet with your professor and discuss during your meeting.

Rules for Electronic Communication with Professors

- Identify yourself when contacting people
- For communication with a professor, you should email between 8 am and 8 pm, which are considered responsible business hours.
- Don't get too personal through email. If you would like to get to know your professor, or you want them to get to know you better, this is best done during office hours.
- Allow your professors time to respond to your email, especially if it was sent on a weekend or on a holiday
- If 48 hours have passed (not counting weekends or holidays), send another follow up email. Only email them twice, and then try to follow up after class or during office hours.

Sample Email

To: rothwellca@cua.edu

From: 07vankampen@cua.edu

Subject: Psychology 201 Course Material Question

Dear Professor Rothwell,

I am in your Psychology 201 class on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9:40 am. I have a few questions to ask you about experimental study design. Do you have time next week to meet and discuss my questions? I would attend your office hours, but I have another class during that time.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Caroline van Kampen

Email Checklist

1. **Review the subject line:** Make sure your subject line is relevant to the content of your email.
2. **Use the correct email address:** Double check you address your professor the same way you would in person (Professor, Dr., etc.)
3. **Check your salutation and signature:** Check to make sure you have started your email with a salutation such as “Dear Professor Smith” and sign off with your full name. Make sure you put your first and last name so they know who you are.
4. **Review spelling and grammar:** Use spell check to make sure you don’t have any embarrassing errors.
5. **Show gratitude:** Thank your professor for the time they are taking to help you.
6. **Hit send!**

How will connecting with professors benefit you?

- Increases professor understanding
- Letters of recommendation
- Career networking
- Career advice
- Research lab opportunities

COVID-19 Impact on Professors

- It is important to remember that professors are people, too. They are dealing with many things right now, just like you are.
- Professors may be dealing with:
 - Taking care of children at home or helping them with virtual schooling
 - Dealing with a COVID diagnosis of a family member
 - Caring for family members recovering from COVID
 - Dealing with the sickness or death of a loved one
 - Pandemic fatigue
- The takeaway: Be patient and kind! COVID is affecting your professors, too.