

MSFEA CREATES: CLEAR AND RESPECTFUL EMAILS

OBJECTIVE OF THE HANDOUT

This handout will help you:

1. Recognize most **common problems in student emails** (being difficult to respond to, lacking formality, lacking expression of respect or gratitude, writing errors, sounding demanding).
2. Understand how professional emails balance **clarity** and **respect**.

PROBLEMS WITH STUDENT EMAILS

Let's look at the below student emails from the perspective of a faculty reader.

Subject: **Class** Subject not related to the email body

Dear **Dr.**, Not a proper way to address faculty. Sounds impersonal and does not communicate respect.

I have already submitted the draft at the link u sent previously. I plan to submit the thesis document early **may**; therefore, I need **the the** draft submitted to be reviewed and improved **ASAP**. What time and day suits you to schedule a meeting?

Regards, Does not communicate gratitude and thankfulness

Too demanding

Typos: Imply lack of attention to detail and lack of effort put into sending this email.

Subject: Tomorrow's exam Impersonal. Does the student not know the last name of the professor and do not want to make the effort to look it up?

Professor,

Typo. Could have been easily fixed.

I was not feeling well last week and haven't been able to study for tomorrow's exam. What do you think **i should do?**

The student is placing the burden on the professor to figure out a solution to his/her problem. Usually, professors have policies on their syllabi about missed exams. Students need to thus indicate they are aware of those policies and they are asking whether they qualify for exceptions. It is so much work for someone receiving an email with such an ask to respond to it quickly, so emails like this are often left unanswered.

Feeling unwell is an impediment to studying, but this sounds vague and almost made up. Professors sympathize with students, but they need more context to do so. Communicating the right information and using the right tone with professors are important to receive compassion and understanding.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS

Anytime we write professional emails, we are balancing **clarity** and **respect**.

Clarity refers to writing directness, conciseness, and organization. **Respect** refers to formality, gratefulness, and giving the choice rather than making demands.

Notice how the below email balances the two and communicates both: clarity and respect.

The email starts with properly addressing the faculty in a respectful and personalized way.

The email provides background and context to remind the faculty who the student is.

Saying something nice is a way to display gratefulness and respect.

A soft statement such as this is respectful and not demanding. It gives the reader the choice, which is important to show respect.

Ending with an action item makes it easier and faster for faculty to respond. Notice how the specific ask is balanced by a respectful statement. This phrase gives the faculty the choice to respond at their convenience rather than phrases such as ASAP.

Dear Dr. AbiGhannam,

I was in your # class last Spring, and I really enjoyed the course content and learned so much.

I am working on my application for Stanford's M.E. program and was wondering **if you would be able to write** me a letter of recommendation supporting my application. The application deadline is **Tuesday, June 30th**.

I know you're extremely busy, but I would appreciate it tremendously if you are able to write the letter on my behalf. And, if you're not available to do so at this point, please know that **I'd completely understand**.

Please **let me know either way at your earliest convenience**. In case you are one of my letter writers, I will need to add your name on my application, and **you will be contacted by the university** with a link with instructions for submission.

Thank you,
XXX

Expressing thanks is important when sending any emails with asks.

Providing brief information about what to expect next is helpful so that faculty are aware of the process.

Providing clear information that can help readers make their decisions is appreciated.

This whole paragraph communicates respect, gratefulness, and understanding. Faculty are more likely to consider such requests than others that sound more demanding.

TAKEAWAYS

Three strategies can help balance clarity and respect to write professional and effective emails:

- ❑ State a clear message/point for the email early on and include concise and relevant details.
- ❑ Convey respect and gratitude throughout.
- ❑ Ensure an efficient response to the email by stating a clear action item towards the end of the email.