How to Write a Productive Email

Crafting an email to employers, professors, and staff can be challenging, especially due to the informal nature of smart phone communication. Setting the right tone in written communication is critical, as it leaves a lasting impression on the reader. This handout will provide you with best practices and tips for writing productive emails at school and in the workplace.

Why should I always write more formal emails?

- **Impressions are important.** Your email may be the first impression you leave on someone. Whether they are faculty and staff of the Institute or a prospective employer, you will leave a positive impression of yourself if your emails are written in a certain way.
- **Clear communication is key.** Only 7% of communication is conveyed through actual words. Body language and tone of voice make up the overwhelming majority of our communication with others. When you remove these components from the equation, your words begin to matter so much more! Say *exactly* what you mean in a clear and concise manner.
- **Start early and send often.** Whether searching for jobs or emailing professors, you are setting yourself up for success in the future. If you begin to write formal emails now to professors and staff, you will more easily make the transition into workplace communication.

Anatomy of an Email:

- Your **subject line should be related to the topic** at hand. This will give the reader a good idea of what to expect and how to prioritize.
- **Begin with a greeting.** Think "*Dear Professor McGonagall...*" or "*Hello Mr. Baggins...*".
- **State your purpose.** Why are you writing to this person? "*I'm writing to inquire about...*" or "*I'm writing in response to...*".
- And/or **thank the recipient.** Everyone's time is valuable and a note of appreciation goes a long way. If someone took time out of their day to answer your inquiry, thank them.
- **Add final remarks.** Do you have a summary point to make? Are you concerned about the reader missing a critical part of the message? Revisit that point towards the end.
- **End with a closing.** You don't have to say "*sincerely*" every time you send an email. Depending on the recipient you could say something like "*best regards*" or "*thank you*" or "*cheers*".
- **Create a signature line.** Include contact information (email and phone), as it allows the recipient to get back to you using other modes of communication if needed. Do this for both desktop and smart phone email apps.

Tips and Best Practices:

- **Be brief and polite.** Most people have dozens of emails to get through each day. If you can make your request short and kind, it will be easier for someone to answer.
- **DON'T USE ALL CAPITALS** – it reads like you're shouting. Avoid excessive use of exclamation points, too! (Just one exclamation point at a time.)
- Likewise, **don't use all lower-case** letters, as that is grammatically incorrect (ex: "i" instead of "I").
- If you are using "please" and "thank you", actually mean it. As mentioned above, **tone is not well conveyed over text** and you'll want to avoid sarcasm.
- **Edit, proofread, and spellcheck BEFORE you send.** Typos and run-on sentences are no fun to read, and you want to make a good impression.
- **Promptly reply to serious messages.** Try to answer all emails within an acceptable timeframe, and during your first week on the job/in a class, ask about expected response times. If you can't reply within the typical response timeframe, send a brief explanation as to why you need more time to write a full response.

- **Follow up** after an appropriate amount of time has passed. If you are applying to a job, wait one to two weeks. Other cases are variable, depending on many factors such the type of work you do, or the date of an impending deadline. (Ask your boss about typical follow-up timing at your company.)
- If you are trying **to schedule an appointment or a meeting** over email, give the reader options to choose from and try to avoid requesting a meeting/appointment on the same day. Abiding by these rules will nearly always get you the response you need, as opposed to going back and forth several times.
- **If your message is urgent**, indicate that in the first or second sentence of the email and then explain why. When possible, consider using other methods of communication such as phone or a messaging app for urgent questions.
- **Check your email daily – or more often,** especially during the job search process and when on the job. Important messages will also be delivered to your WIT email from professors, advisors, and Institute staff.

Sample Emails:

Sending an Inquiry

Subject: Concern/Issue/Question about X

Hi/Dear Name,

I have a question about/I want to check with you about issue or concern.

Could you please help me with issue/question? I am happy to discuss this in more detail over a video call or the phone.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Insert Your Signature Here

Following Up on an Inquiry

Subject: Follow-up about **Concern/Issue/Question**

Hi/Dear **Name**,

I am following up on my resent email about **concern/issue/question**. I know you are busy, so am forwarding you my original message below.

Could you please update me on this? I am happy to talk further over a video or phone call if that would be best.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Insert Your Signature Here

[Forwarded email content is below your signature so reader can easily see your original message.]

Sending a Response

Subject: RE: Title of Original Message

Dear Name,

Thank you for your prompt response. I appreciate you taking the time to consider my request/question/concern. Insert follow-up questions or information here.

Sincerely,

Insert Your Signature Here