How To Write Effective Academic And Professional Emails

Part 1 – Use the appropriate register when emailing

Register is defined as the level of formality of language used in communication; in other words, word choice depends upon the person who is being addressed, the social situation in which the interaction occurs, and the form of the language used, either spoken or written.[1] For example, you would likely not address your grandmother the same way you address your best friend, you might address your favorite professor differently in the classroom than you would if you met them on the street, and you would employ different language in an academic essay than in your text messages. You use the proper *register* for each group of individuals with whom you interact.

Emailing is often seen as an informal means of communication. However, when writing academic or professional emails, you should use a more formal register, especially if you do not know the receiver of the email personally or if you are making an important request. In other words, do not start your email with "Hey, Prof!" This greeting will not get your professional message off to a good start.

Modal verbs (e.g., can, could) are used to indicate register when making polite requests for permission (the pronoun *I* as subject) and polite requests (the pronoun *you* as subject).

	Greetings	Polite Requests (*I* as subject)	Polite Requests (*YOU* as subject)	Closings
Friendly	*Hey*	*Can I hand in my paper late?*	*Please let me know.*	*Thanks,*
↓	*Hi, Hello* (with or without the person's first name)	**Could I hand in my paper?*	*Can you let me know?*	*Thank you,*
	Hi (Dr./ Prof. / first name)	*May I hand in my paper late?*	**Could you let me know?*	**Best,*
Formal (or an important request)	**Hello* (Dr./Prof. + last name)	*Do you mind if I hand in my paper late?*	**Would you let me know?*	*Best regards,*
	*Dear (Dr./ Prof. + last name)	*Would you mind if I handed in my paper late?*	*Would you mind letting me know?*	**Sincerely,*

*The highlighted cells indicate an appropriate register for most academic and professional emails.

Part 2 – Academic and professional email dos and don'ts

1. DO make sure that you need to email your professor. (Can the answer be found in the course outline, class notes, or textbook?)
2. DO use your Bishop's University email.
3. DO use standard spelling and grammar.
4. DO use the correct register.
5. DO fill in the subject line of the email.
6. DO identify yourself.
7. DO keep your email simple and to the point.
8. DON'T use emoji or slang ☹.
9. DON'T add extra or superfluous information.
10. DON'T expect an immediate answer, especially at night or on weekends. *

If you have not heard from your professor in three or four business days, you can send another email.

Part 3 - Parts of an academic or professional email

Every academic or professional email should contain the following items:

1. a completed subject line
2. a salutation or greeting appropriate to the receiver of the email
3. the identity of the sender
4. the body of the email (state the problem, make a request)
5. your expectations of the receiver
6. a closing appropriate to the receiver of the email
7. your full name

An example of an appropriate email request to a professor:
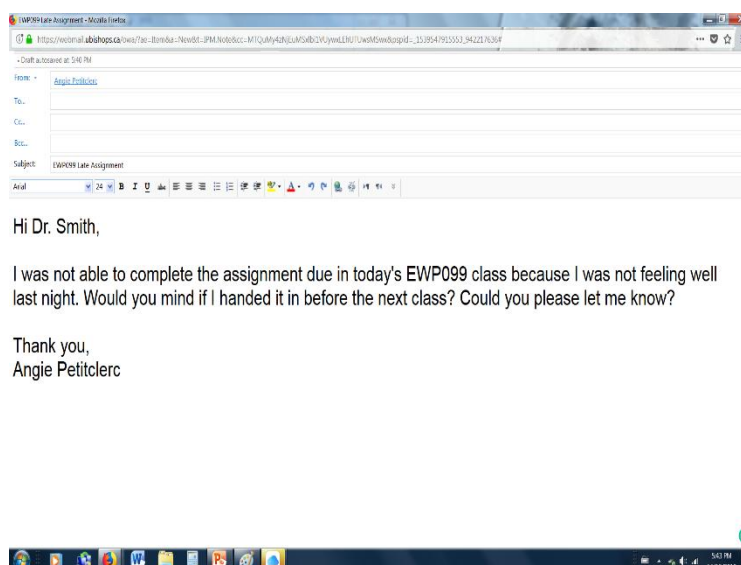
Material quoted from:

[1] Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The grammar book: An ESL/EFL course* (2nd ed.). Heinle & Heinle. (pp. 23-24).