

At some point during your time as a student or employee, you may have to write an email to your professor, supervisor, peers, and/or colleagues. Therefore, when drafting these emails, it is not only important to be clear and concise, but it is also just as important to use appropriate language and tone.

1. Write a clear and concise subject line.

Ex: Question regarding class syllabus

- **The subject line should reflect the main purpose of your email.**
- **Remember to keep it as concise as possible!**

2. Begin your email with a salutation.

Ex: Dear Professor Doe,

When writing emails to your professor (or even your boss), be sure to use the appropriate level of formality. While you can say “hey,” this salutation would be considered too informal. “Dear,” and “Hello,” are the most appropriate salutations to use in this scenario.

Be sure to include the professor’s title and, unless otherwise instructed by your professor, always use his/her/their last name.

3. Give your professor some context.

Ex: My name is Jane Dee, and I am/was a student in your English110 course (Tuesdays/Thursdays).

Since your professor has many students, it’s polite to remind them of who you are and the course that you are or were enrolled in (If you are confident that your professor is already familiar with you, you may skip this step). Provide any additional information that you think might be necessary.

4. Clarify your purpose for writing this email. Each student may have a different purpose for emailing their professors. Below are examples of the four most common reasons.

→ When you need some clarity on an assignment or lecture:

Ex: I am having a hard time understanding the terms “context/exigence” from today’s class lecture. I have reread the handout you have given us multiple times, but I still find myself a little confused. While I understand that “context” refers to the setting and time period in which a piece was written, I’m unsure of what “exigence” is referring to. Do they both mean the same thing?

- **Be specific about what you don't understand; don't let your professor do all the guesswork.**

Explain the steps you have already taken to answer the problem on your own (e.g., read the handout, reviewed the syllabus).

→ When you need an extension on an assignment:

Ex: I was wondering whether or not it would be possible for you to grant me a two-day extension for the Rhetorical Analysis Essay? While I have already started my essay, I have fallen a little behind due to getting sick with the flu.

- **Be specific about the number of days you may need to complete this assignment.**
- **While your gut instinct may be to exaggerate the reason for falling behind, be honest here. Furthermore, don't feel pressured to tell your professor everything if you're uncomfortable sharing these details.**

→ *When you need a letter of recommendation:*

Ex: I was hoping that you'd be willing to write me a letter of recommendation for the Critical Language Scholarship? This program is a competitive, national scholarship that allows students the opportunity to study a critical language abroad. I'm interested in learning more advanced Spanish in Peru. Since your class was the only class in which I was given the chance to draw on my native language (Spanish) for assignments and truly shine, I thought you might be the best person to ask for a recommendation letter.

For your convenience, I have attached a copy of my resume, all of the required personal statements, and a document containing a more thorough description of the program. The deadline for this application is May 15th. Please let me know if you're willing. Thank you!

- **Give a brief description of what you're applying to.**
- **Explain why you're interested in this specific scholarship, program, or school.**
- **Remind your professor of the kind of work you did in their class and how it might relate to what you're applying to.**
- **Don't expect your professor to write you an excellent letter of recommendation out of thin air! Attach a copy of all the necessary materials your professor may need.**
- **Explicitly state the deadline.**
- **Skip a line between paragraphs.**

→ *When you need a professor to be your thesis/dissertation advisor or research mentor.*

Ex: I was hoping that you'd be willing to be my advisor for my graduate thesis. After taking your course on postcolonial novels, I realized that I was very interested in the subject matter and had many questions regarding it. I have also read a few of your published articles, and in one you state, "the postcolonial novel reflects the trauma of the once-colonized, marginalized subjects." I bring this up is because, in my thesis, I'd like to explore a specific Indian novella that delves into the topic of the post-colonial Indian world and the issues that stemmed from imperialism. I'd be excited if you'd be able to guide and mentor me through this project. Please get back to me at your earliest convenience.


- Express your interest in what they teach.
- If possible, read a few of their recently published articles, and quote/paraphrase an idea that resonates with your research interests. Doing so not only demonstrates your level of investment in the subject to your professor, but also shows that you have a specific reason for wanting to work with them.

5. Just like you would a letter, don't forget to sign off.

Ex: Best,
Jane

- Close the email with your name. Remember to maintain a professional tone, so it's best to close with phrases such as "best," "sincerely," "regards," etc.

E-mail Example

To:  Professor's Email Address

Cc:

Bcc:

Subject: Question about Today's Lecture

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Dear Professor Doe,

My name is Jane Dee, and I am a student in your English110 course (Tuesdays/Thursdays).

I am having a hard time understanding the terms “context/exigence” from today’s class lecture. I have reread the handout you have given us multiple times, but I still find myself a little confused. While I understand that “context” refers to the setting and time period in which a piece was written, I’m unsure of what “exigence” is referring to.

Do they both mean the same thing?

Best,
Jane