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## Inappropriate emails to professors

Hey, the email started, I was just wondering what my grade was at the finals because I kind of expected a little better grade overall. I know I shit myself on long analytical paper, but... I definitely thought I did a good job in the finals, you also know that you are great at participating and ... . I'm almost certain I only had two absences, so yes, just curious, and I don't want to bother you at all, I just need to have grades for the student to teach one of these days. Since the email exploded on the scene in the early 1990s, it has become a fast, popular and convenient medium for communication between students and their professors. Some will argue that it has become too convenient. Today, students seem to rely less on face-to-face meetings or phone calls with their instructors, and more on emails, which they use to challenge grades, explain absences, deliver unsolicited paper drafts, and announce their intention to drop by outside of business hours, assuming we'll be available or move our schedules to meet their needs. Today's students see themselves as customers in consumer culture who are entitled to answers and information 24 hours a day. Do things really have to be like this? A culture of informality increasingly borders between those issues that professors can reasonably address via email and those they could not blur. In some cases, such as providing written feedback and answering questions about counselling, investing the time needed to respond appropriately is simply too great. Students who persist in their requests for after-hours consultations are often egocentric, blinding them to the fact that the faculty has lives outside the academic environment. Recently, a graduate student at our institution e-mailed a professor to ask for an assignment, and when he didn't respond until the next morning, she contacted her counselor to complain. When the professor had not yet responded by that evening, she called his home angrily, only for his wife to inform him that he had been called out of town with the sudden death of his father. However, the demand for accessibility is only one problem. Many of those who make up today's professor, including us, are baby boomers, who nostalgically recall the cherished epistolary relationship we had with pen friends, when adhering to the appropriate grammar rules was as important to us as peculiar handwriting. We considered the possibility that misspelled and faulty punctuation would reflect badly on our image and it was down to what others thought. Today's technology-conscious generation, which relies on instant messaging as a form of immediate satisfaction, is inevitably caught in the cultural crossfire between their routine use of colloquial expression and our often persistent insistence on compliance Rules. Even those faculty members who are generous with their after-hours hours are often offended by the lack of professionalism and netiquette - network etiquette used in electronic communications - practiced by many student writers. The good news, according to author Mary Mitchell as quoted in The New York Times, is that the email encourages people to write; the bad news is that it discourages people [from writing] thoughtfully. Questions range from the sometimes astonishing absence of proper grammar and punctuation to an abundance of misspelled words to furious quies. Equally disturbing is the increasing use of acronyms or phonetic spellings by students that may be unknown to those outside their generation (e.g. Many students see no need to show even a smidgen of respect for those in positions of authority, especially in email. Some students completely omit greetings; others simply start with Dear Professor, which is the equivalent of addressing someone as a gentleman or a lady, without a last name. At the other extreme are those students who, although complete strangers, feel perfectly comfortable sharing with the titles, addressing us by name as if we had been friends for years. Occasionally, however, students do not fully observe the existence of professional boundaries, as in the case of a graduate student who began an email to his professor and administrator writing: hey ladies. In a published response to an online article published by the web magazine Inside Higher Ed, the academic shared guidelines he implements in dealing with student emails. He refers to his disciples as follows: When you send me an email of this phrase, I expect you have 'proven' it (1) for spelling, (2) for grammatical accuracy, (3) to use vocabulary and (4) for composition. If your message does not pass my test in all four respects, it will be returned to you with a message that reads: This message is unsuitable for review. Revise it according to the requirements specified in your curriculum . . . and then wash it again.' . . . Needless to say, given my criteria for email communication, you will save yourself and me a lot of time and energy by writing me intelligent messages. Students often seem unaware that in every written communication they send, they create the impression of their intelligence, attitude and professionalism. But I am special infrequently, attendance-related messages are accompanied by requests for special consideration, as in the following example: I missed only one class. It was Tuesday, I was there for all the other classes, and I have a doctor's note. Hopefully, since I have honestly only one class that doctors notes will earn for I'm allowed to miss four absences. That's why I got it, so I could save the other 3 absences, and so I could prove that I was seriously sick, and could get extra help if necessary. I have a friend in my class who can get notes from me, and I'm determined to pass your class. In the next message, packed with a heavy dose of drama, the student-teacher asks his supervisor to make a decision on whether to stay home or not: My weekend is ruined by a killer cold. I feel bronchitis coming. What do I do? I've got a runny nose, ears attached, my head's a mess, and I'm coughing all over the place. Obviously I want to be in school, but I don't want the kids or [my host teacher] to get sick. Also typical are emails with requests for additional help in the course. Occasionally, however, students don't seem to understand exactly what they're looking for. One student asks that her professor revise her work for her, instead of reviewing it: I was planning on writing my paper tomorrow, and I was curious to see if I emailed it to you if you would still be willing to revise it by telling me if I was going in the right direction or not and if it made sense. Please let me know. Another student, who was asked to submit a tentative thesis rather than a topic, writes with a similar request: For my second work, I use Walt Whitman's Live Oak with Moss III and Emily Dickinson's Wild nights. Can I hand this paper over to Thurso to revise it for me? Unfortunately, seeing themselves as consumers rather than members of the intellectual community, some students actually expect their professors to revise, edit and edit their essays. Other students, acknowledging that professors have full and busy schedules, do not feel reluctance to ask faculty members to review their creative writing, as if it were a service the professor is obliged to provide: I realize that you are busy with the final grades . . . . But I just updated a short story I wrote last year and I'd like to know if you could read it? If [you] can look and write me back it would be highly appreciated. A faculty member had already once refused to read the story and encouraged the student to join a group of faculty writers, but the student's demands for professional validation of his fiction persisted nonetheless. Even graduate students aren't immune from making a bad impression. One writes, Hello Professor. I'm writing to you because I have a lot of problems with the course papers. I have never written a paper of this length and size and I have found that I do not know where to start and when I believe that I am ready to start finding that I am not able to. The feeling lately that my undergraduate is the most supreme of me, that I don't have a background you-so-ever in this species critical thinking and textual analysis... How do I take a thought, a glimmer of insight, and make a paper out of 20-25 of that? I feel out of place right now, so any guidelines would be highly appreciated.... If the message hadn't been tortured like that, someone might have laughed; As it is, we ask ourselves together with the student how her undergraduate education could have failed so supremely. Another common trend is that students ask professors to ignore the fact that the draft sent by email has not yet been read: I began to write a little of my work... I definitely don't have proof that I read this yet. Thank you for checking on me. Another student writes: I wondered if you would look through my newspaper. I would have appreciated it very much . Thank you. I will send it as an attachment and as a separate email I will copy paste paper incase you can not open the attachment. What such students do not realize is that rough designs are already laborious to read because thoughts are often ill-conceived and organized; when the prose is also unseeded or lectic, the sketches become even more difficult and time-consuming to read and respond to. The epidemic of stalling procrastination is, of course, an epidemic on college campuses, leaving some students to email preliminary drafts of 48 (and occasionally, even 24) hours before the paper is due. In the following message, the student seeks last-minute approval for a topic about a work that doesn't really exist: I was just wondering if you could look at my thesis for a paper due out Thursday, since I struggled a little with coming up with a solid thesis on the last paper... In any case, here is my thesis. In literature, symbolism is often used to offer the reader a deeper insight into the characters of the story, and many times it depicts a hidden meaning. A good example of the symbolism used in this way is in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Scarlet Ending'. Not only did the student misspell the author's name and title of the novel, but the eight-page writing guidelines provided warned students to avoid weak beginnings in their work, such as Often in Literature or Symbolism used by many authors. . . . Even with the Writing Guidelines in hand, which offer more examples of sustainable tess, some of our students still require additional advice at the eleventh hour: BOK, I wondered if a good topic for my second work would be the comparison between Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. If this could work, I'd like to know what the best way to do it would be. Another student whose work was to be published just two days later, writes: I wondered if you could help me with my statement of thesis very quickly. I've been knocking down ideas for a few hours now and I've been wondering if it seems like a solid thesis... I another writes: I wondered if you could do me a favor and confirm the song I use for critical questions... The latter request might have been reasonable had it not been for the fact that the student should have been working on the song in question the previous ten weeks of the semester, and answers to critical questions were due the next day. Other students baselessly shift responsibility for printing their final drafts to their course instructor. Often, such requests come as a result of students forgetting to bring hard copies of their completed assignment to class, but still want to get credit for their work. Sometimes, however, as in the following example, it seems that the student is clearly trying to avoid responsibility for printing paper on his own: Attached to this email is my analytical paper. I'm emailing it to you because I don't have a printer and I misplaced my ID at some point today. I didn't know any other way to print out my paper, but I wanted you to have it by the hour of Thursday morning. Please, if you correct this, it is not acceptable in the email format let me know, so I can somehow make schedules to print it. In this case, the student provides a multitude of reasons why she sends paper electronically and at least considers the possibility that her professor may be unwilling to print the essay. Often, however, students simply miss class on the day the task is done, and then send their papers electronically without explanation, assuming that they have thus fulfilled their duty and met the deadline. One does not think about the fact that professors are then expected to spend time – not to mention the price of paper and ink if an email is received at home – to print students' work. Sometimes, the email problem doesn't so much lie in what students are looking for as in their tone. The following message was sent by the student-teacher to her supervisor (who, incidentally, never agreed to observe the student on the date in question): I was pretty upset that you didn't come on Friday. You said if you couldn't come in for a few days tell me you were coming. I'd like you to e-mail me during the day. I have access to computers and e-mails and I would like to know these things. Although the above message sounds just cranniesy, occasionally, students use email in a way that is openly hostile. The following message is from a graduate student who has been advised that he can find answers to all his emailed questions, with the exception of what he should do regarding forgetting his password, in a counselling manual that was developed precisely for this purpose: I am sorry to be clearly inconvenienced by your precious time, but you are my adviser and I am pretty sure it is your job to clear up any misunderstandings that I could since I'm a full-fledged student. If you have such a problem dealing with your students in this way, you may want to reconsider your role as counselor. I thought communicating with a real person might be more useful than trying to find one specific answer to twenty pages of information. Although this full-payment student, who lists his consumer status as a ticket giving him the right to seek answers from a real person rather than online or in a printed copy, later apologized, there was no acknowledgment on his part that the tone he used in his earlier message was inappropriate. On the contrary, he cited the need for future assistance as the reason for his apology. What to do? Some practical advice So what did the beleaguered professor do about the barrage of poorly written, sometimes incomprehensible, and often urgent emails that attack her daily? We propose that faculty members give students an example of email etiquette at the beginning of the semester. Make it a separate material to highlight its importance and ensure it does not end up buried in the course curriculum. Numerous netiquette guides can be found online, but two specifically geared towards academia are particularly useful. The following suggestions are drawn from email Etiquette-Adapted for Academia, provided by Herb Mattord at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, and from Email Etiquette (Netiquette), compiled by David Tuffley at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia. We supplemented their lists with some additional pointers of their own and encouraged instructors to provide students with these guidelines at the beginning of the semester: Don't email your professor to ask if they'll forgive a certain absence. Most professors allow a certain number of absences without expecting explanation. In addition, reducing unnecessary attention to your absence only consumes your time and that of your professor. We don't want to hear about stomach bugs (or how many trips you made to the bathroom during the night), fights with roommates or court appearances. However, we want to know about serious illnesses, family deaths and other events in your life that cause hardship and affect your performance in our classes. Do not send an email to your professor asking for notes or materials you misplaced. If you miss class or lose notes, contact your peers. Instead of emailing the professor, let your friend in the class know that it will take you to pick up all the material and to notice any changes to the curriculum that you will miss because of your absence. Don't email your professor asking (or complaining) about your grades. If you want to talk about the grade you received on the assignment, be late with the professor or sit down during business hours. Also, do not send an email to your professors asking if they have completed the Task. The instructors will return the papers as soon as they're stunned. The same goes for final grades. Professors should not be expected to inform individual students about their final grades by email, nor should they be expected to explain how the final grade was calculated. This is the purpose of providing a curriculum evaluation policy. Think about what you're looking for before email. Your professors are busy, too. Make sure that the answer to your question is not readily available elsewhere or that you cannot wait until you see your professor in class to ask your question. Treat your faculty (and fellow students) with respect, even in email. Always use the correct name of your professors: dr. or professor. Unless you are specifically invited to do so, do not call them by name. Do not e-mail a draft of your assignment to your professor for examination. Your professors are assiduous to assess your studies. Asking them to rate the task twice is unfair to them and to your peers. If you want guidance on completing a task, resushe the meeting or stop by during business hours. Sending emails to your assignments to your professor asking for an informal review is a way of saying: My time is more valuable than yours; Tell me exactly what I need to do to get a good grade. Don't expect an immediate response to your email. Emailing professors at 2:00 .m is fine, but don't expect an answer until 8:00 .m. Each professor has a different work schedule and personal life. Email is a great way to get your question to your professor, but understand that she may not be able to answer it right away. In some cases, your professors may not have access to information about your question unless they are in the office. Twenty-four or even 48 hours is the standard email response window during a business week. Don't wait a day or two before the semester – a long project needs to ask for feedback or advice on the project. It reflects badly on you. On such a late date, you no longer have time to take seriously any advice the professor might give you even if he had time to give it to you. You're what e-mail. Your emails to your professor help shape their professional opinion of you. In some settings, email is the primary means by which the professor will be able to form an opinion about you. Remember that you can ask a professor to write a letter of recommendation for employment, graduate school or scholarship. Any communication you have with your professors will add to the impression that they are shaping you. Make sure it's positive. Read each e-mail message twice before sending it. And closely related to the previous advice – think about your audience. The person you use when you are friends with instant messages is usually unsuitable for your professors, where formalities are expected. Check the curriculum before asking unnecessary questions. Do not ask about information that is readily available in the curriculum. Professors, who must balance an extremely demanding schedule - including course preparations, paper evaluation, board meetings and other types of appointments - can take umbrage when asked to provide information that is already available. Use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Regardless of the professional field you enter, sticking to basic writing skills will serve you well. Ignoring such grounds risks leaving a negative impression, which will be extremely difficult to erase. Include a detailed title. Never leave the subject line blank, and if you're replying to an old message with an outdated title, replace it with the current subject. Keep your message concise and precise. If you find yourself writing more than two or three short passages, consider going into a binoculars with the professor. Don't shout the message. Do not use all uppercase letters or exaggeration!!!! This common practice is the online equivalent of shouting and many people find it very rude. Avoid angry outbursts. Do not send or reply to a message when you are angry. Wait until you calm down, then compose the email. Display your readability message. Use spaces and breaks between paragraphs and long sentences to make it easier to read a message. List your full name at

the end of each email message. Your professors can have more Jennifer in any semester. Also, your nickname may be familiar to your friends, but your instructor may have no idea who Sticky Buns is. Finally, remind students from time to time that you won't respond to messages that haven't been verified for spelling, grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. And then stick to your guns. Weapon.

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