



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

## E-mail Etiquette

**Some instructors will encourage you to communicate by e-mail or on a discussion board.**

Below is a basic e-mail template for such communications.

1. E-mail only from your University of Calgary email account (@ucalgary.ca)
2. E-mail should be courteous and to the point. Identify the reason for your e-mail in the subject line (Request for grade).
3. Greet your instructor by name ("Dear Professor Johnson")
4. Identify yourself clearly (I am a student in MATH 249, Section 3)
5. Make your request politely without many other comments. ("Could you please tell me my grade on the midterm"). It is not typical for students to inquire about their instructor's health or family or to expect that the instructor will similarly ask about theirs. It is also not necessary to comment on the class, your liking for the instructor etc.
6. Briefly explain any circumstances that make your request necessary ("I know these are usually posted, but I do not see my grade on our class site").
7. Express appreciation for the instructor's extra work on your behalf. ("Thank you for taking the time to look into this for me").
8. Use a polite closing with your full name and student number: e.g. Sincerely, Your Name (in the form the professor will know from class lists), 0011111.

**Always make an effort to be polite.** It is very easy to misinterpret e-mail tone and you may unintentionally come across as rude if you make abrupt demands or complain about the class or the instructor. If you want to discuss a sensitive issue, it is better to come in person to see the instructor. You can politely make a request for an appointment through e-mail.

You will notice that after repeated exchanges or when you begin to know the instructor better, the tone of the e-mail will become less formal on both ends. Greetings and closings may sometimes be omitted and the content may become briefer and more casual. This is usual and does not indicate annoyance or a lack of respect.

So, **when** is it appropriate to contact your instructor?

- If you need clarification about course material or assignments and you cannot find the information yourself by checking your syllabus, assignment sheet, textbook or notes
- If you are unable to hand in an assignment on time or will be absent for a test. Remember that you may need to provide documentation of a legitimate reason for this, such as a doctor's note to confirm an illness.
- If you need to discuss your progress in class, test results, or difficulties with the lecture or readings.

Do not assume your instructor has time to talk to you right after class. Ask if she has a few minutes to answer a question for you. If you are online, the instructor may volunteer to stay a few minutes after each lecture. You could also make that request in the chat and see if she is available or can set up another time.

If you need more than a couple of minutes of her time, make an appointment to see her. Many instructors will give their office hours on the course outline. These are the times that the instructor is available to give extra help to students, go over tests, or discuss difficulties you may be having. If you are studying from home in a different time zone, you may need to communicate through e-mail. Make sure your instructor is aware of the time difference.