

## **Five principles for communicating with professors**

- 1. Provide reasons that appeal to your audience's values and motivations**
  - Professors are concerned about their subject matter, research and class
  - They are concerned about your learning, but not necessarily your grades or GPA
  - Professors are very busy and value their time
- 2. Think about how your audience perceives you**
  - You want to be perceived as capable, hard-working, ethical and eager to learn
  - You do NOT want to be perceived as only caring about grades
- 3. Put important information early—where your audience is sure to see it**
- 4. Use correct titles when addressing superiors**
  - Refer to professors as Dr. or Professor
  - Avoid using “Mr.” or “Mrs.”
  - If your professor invites you to use their first name, you may use it
- 5. Always express gratitude**

**For each of the following scenarios, rank the potential emails from most to least appropriate. Be prepared to discuss which of the communication principles each email meets or violates. Try to identify the number of problems with each email.**

**Scenario 1: You become very sick and need to request an extension for a homework assignment.**

(a) Subject: Homework

Mrs. Wolfe,  
i got sick yesterday and havent been able to complete my homework due tomorrow.  
What do you think i should do?  
thanks,  
k—

(b) Subject: Homework due 9/13

Dr. Wolfe:  
I contracted the flu yesterday and have been unable to complete the homework due tomorrow. Your class is very important to me and I plan on completing the homework so that I am prepared for the test. Would it be possible for me to turn the homework in on Friday? I would really appreciate the opportunity, although I understand that your policies might not allow you to make exceptions.

Thank you very much,  
K—K--

(c) Subject: A favor please

Dear Professor Wolfe:  
This is K—K-- in your xx-xxx class. I am very sorry to bother you, but I have a favor to ask. Yesterday morning, I became very sick and I had a fever of 101. I had to stay in bed all day and I missed all of my classes. My fever did not disappear until this afternoon. Because I have been so sick, I have been unable to complete the homework that is due tomorrow. I am very worried about losing points on this assignment because I made a C on the last test and I am worried about my grade slipping even further. Please, may I turn in the assignment on Friday?

Again, I am very sorry for bothering you.  
Thank you,  
K—K—

**Scenario 2: You are worried about how you are doing in one of your class and want to email a professor asking for help.**

(a) Subject: Feedback on upcoming homework

Joanna: I want to make sure I am going in the right direction with Wednesday's homework. My problem statement and graph are attached, but I'm a little bit confused about what to include in part 3. If you have time, could you please look over what I have done and let me know if it is going in the right direction? Any feedback you can provide would be very appreciated.

Thank you,  
R--

(b) Subject: Need help

Hi, Professor Wolfe.

I'm not going to lie to you; I'm very concerned about my grade for this class. I'm starting to get discouraged because I didn't do too well on the first test and I lost a lot of points on some of my homework. I feel that I am just not getting some important concepts in this class and I am worried about my GPA. I am concerned about the next homework we have coming up. Can you give me some more information about what I should include?

(c) Subject: Hello

Dear Dr. Wolfe:

This is R—R—in your xx-xxx class. Your class is very important to me. I would like to be a medical researcher after I graduate and the information you are teaching is instrumental in helping me achieve this goal. I have learned a lot this semester, although my grades do not always reflect what I have learned and I am trying to fix this situation. I really appreciate you taking the time out to help me.

I have attached the homework due on Wednesday. Can you look it over and let me know ASAP what I need to do to get an A?

Most appreciatively,  
R—R—

**Scenario 3: You had to miss a class for reasons out of your control.**

- (a) Subject: Missed class  
Mrs. Wolfe: I missed class on Friday. Did I miss anything important?
  
- (b) Subject: Class on Friday  
Professor:  
Last Friday, I had to leave town for an emergency. Can you tell me what I missed?
  
- (c) Subject: Class on Friday  
I had a family emergency and had to miss class last Friday. I have looked at the materials you posted on Blackboard and I got the notes from a classmate. Unfortunately, I am not available during your office hours. Is there another convenient time that I might come by your office to review a few concepts and check my understanding?

**Scenario 4: You receive a grade that you feel is unfair and decide to talk to your professor in person during her office hours. Which of the following is the best way to phrase your request to consider changing your grade?**

- (a) “The grading of this assignment was very harsh. I worked very hard on it and I believe I followed all of the requirements. This grade does not reflect my abilities. I request that you re-grade the assignment.”
  
- (b) “I am very concerned about my progress in this class. I really want to do well and I respect your knowledge very much. However, I feel that this assignment may have been too challenging for me. I was confused by many of the instructions. What should I do?”
  
- (c) “I would like to go over this assignment with you. I had some points marked off and I am not sure what I did wrong. Could you explain this to me so I can do better next time?”