

## **Label your emails with a professional subject line:**

Make it pertinent to the topic of your email. Do not use simple sayings such as "For you" or "Please Read" in your subject line. This may result in your emailing being sorted to the Junk Mail folder. A professional subject line helps ensure your email's recipient will read the email and not disregard it for miscellaneous junk or spam

## **Address the recipient by name, if possible:**

If you don't know his or her name, look it up. Most companies have a website or a phone directory. Make every attempt to learn the name of the email's recipient. *The highest compliment you can pay to someone is to use his/her name.* Make certain to address the individual to whom you plan to send your email by using his or her name and appropriate title. If the individual is a professor, avoid using the professor's first name, unless you have a clearly established relationship which permits for this type of informality. In other words, you both have agreed to employ "first" names in your interactions. It is appropriate to use the following: *Dear Dr. Smith; Hello Dr. Smith; Greetings Dr. Smith; Dear Professor Smith*, for example. This information represents the *salutation* of your email – your greeting, and placing it in this manner helps the receiver to understand that he or she is the intended recipient of the email. Do not *imply* the salutation by thinking that the use of an individual's email address alone suffices or compensates for the lack of a salutation. It doesn't. An email sent without an appropriate salutation may exert a negative impression and can be likened to a kind of "Hey you," instead of a more polite address that considers the value of a person's name – and by extension, that *person*. In communications with faculty, administrators, and staff, it is best to maintain a more formal stance, unless of course, you have an established informal relationship with these individuals: in other words, you both know each other and have encouraged a more informal manner of address.

## **Establish your identity and corporate affiliation:**

Even if you and the recipient of your email have met before, it's always wise to include a business signature or other information to remind him who you are and where you work. It's a courtesy that lets them proceed to answering your email quickly, instead of having to look up who you are and how to contact you.

*Sincerely,  
John Smith  
Graduate Assistant: Department of Mechanical Engineering  
Vibration Laboratory  
WMU College of Engineering, Parkview Campus/Mail Stop: XXXX  
Office: 6. 0000  
Cell: 269.000.0000*

## Write the purpose of your email out clearly:

Propose any deals or relationships you hope to create as a result of the email. Provide any details necessary for the reader to make any decisions or take any actions. By including all information necessary, you help to expedite any deals made as a result of the email.

*Dear Dr. Smith,*

*The purpose of my email is to remind you of our previous meeting on June 2, 2013, when you provided an overview of my Graduate Student Research Grant application. During that meeting, you asked me to re-write the proposal and submit it to you for your final approval. That document is attached.*

*Dear Dr. Smith,*

*My name is John Smith, and I am a graduate student in your on-line course, ENG 7888: The 19th Century Novel. I have encountered some difficulty with the course and would like to speak with you about ways that I can be successful. I would appreciate your advice and am interested in scheduling an appointment. Please let me know your availability.*

Note the brevity of the information contained in the body of the email. The information is direct, succinct, and it captures in a few sentences 1. the identity of the writer and 2. The purpose of the communication. In both instances, the professor has received all of the information necessary to address the students' requests: A. Review the next draft of a grant proposal; B. Schedule an appointment.

## Avoid slang or rambling within your email:

Just because text messages use abbreviations, that is not a reason to include them in your professional email. Your email should be concise. Not only is the reader a busy person, but he or she may be reading your email on a mobile device. A shorter, to-the-point email is much easier to read and respond to than a lengthy, confusing one.

### **Say "Thank You":**

After your email has been completed, make certain to write a brief sentence of gratitude, thanking the recipient for his or her time and assistance. Let's refer to the examples in Item #2:

*Thank you for your time in reviewing my research grant. I look forward to hearing from you.*

*I look forward to a productive meeting in which we can discuss ways to improve my grades, and I thank you for your time and assistance.*

Remember that almost every email that you send represents a request on your part: you are asking for someone's assistance, clarification, expertise, time, opinion, perspective, etc. A simple acknowledgment clearly signals to the recipient that you are very much aware of this fact.

## ***Check Grammar, Mechanics, Tone:***

Make certain that the language used in your email is appropriate to the purpose of sending the email in the first place, and respectful of the person to whom you are sending it. For formal purposes, does the language reflect the right tone? Are there spelling mistakes, mistakes in punctuation or in grammatical usage? Is the language clear, succinct, direct – or muddled, convoluted, and abstruse? Failure to attend to these seemingly minor issues may reflect poorly upon the sender.

## **Review Your Email before Sending:**

Make certain that your email *reads* the way you want it to read. If you aren't certain, place it in the "draft" category on your computer and let it *cool down* so that you establish some distance between you and your written words, especially if the subject of the email is stressful or upsetting. Then, when you're ready, return to it and review one last time. Are the language and tone polite and professional or are they snarky, disrespectful, angry or hostile? It's clear from the following two examples, which email communication will be the most effective and produce a positive outcome. Consider *yourself* and *your reaction* if you were the **recipient** in each of the following two scenarios:

### Example #1: (Unprofessional Communication)

*Jane, I've sent email and also called you 2 times now and you still haven't answered. Is something wrong with your phone? Maybe you're on vacation. Anyway, I'm sick and tired of waiting for you to do your job. I need that examination information NOW so that I can take care of my business. You promised it days ago. Send it ASAP! You're not a student and you don't know what we go through.*

### Example #2: (Professional Communication)

*Hello Jane,*  
*I hope that all is well there. I've tried to contact you several times regarding the information that you were going to send so that I could prepare for my examinations next month, but I haven't heard from you. I know how busy it is at this time of year. If you could prepare that information for me, I will make a special trip over to your office and pick up the materials myself so that you don't have to mail them to me. I'm a bit nervous about the upcoming exams, and access to those study guides would really help me a lot.*  
*Please send me an email or call me and let me know a good time to stop by, and if you need me to assist you in compiling the guides, I can do that easily. Professor Smith gave me a complete list of all the titles, and so it should take only a few minutes.*

*Thank you.*  
*Sincerely,*  
*John Smith*  
*269.000.0000*

## **Acknowledge Receipt Within 48 Hours:**

The unwritten rule in business is to try to respond to email within a period of 48 hours (two business days) from the time of receipt, even if you may not necessarily have the exact answer to the sender's question. In that case, the message can be as simple as the following: *"I don't know the answer to your question, but I'll find out and then get back to you as soon as possible."* And then, deliver what you have promised. Given the scenario in *Item #9*, there is another side to consider. Clearly, the first example indicates the students' mounting frustration with *Jane*, who has failed to send along the information the student has requested on several occasions. It is important to bear in mind the fact that failed communication is a two way street. As soon as Jane heard from the student, she could *easily* have sent an email or called him to 1. Acknowledge receipt of his request and 2. Make arrangements to provide the requested materials by a specific date. While Jane should not be subjected to rudeness under any circumstances, her failure to communicate with the student – her lapse into silence – sends the unfortunate impression that she doesn't care, when in fact, that may not be the case at all. As soon as Jane received the student's email, she should have responded in the following manner:

*Dear John,*

*I understand that you need the testing materials for your upcoming examinations. They are here in my office and it would be great if you can stop by and pick them up. Our offices are being relocated this week, and in addition to that, one of the office staff was taken seriously ill, and I have had to take over her job. Let me know, and I'll do my best to assist you.*

It is very likely that Jane's immediate acknowledgment of the student's needs could have prevented the unpleasant exchange expressed in the scenario in *Item 9*.

## **When Necessary, Use an Alternate Mode of Communication:**

There may be times when sending an email is simply not the most appropriate mode of communication for your particular needs. Emails that are overly-long and that involve highly-detailed or complex matters may not serve you, or the recipients, in a productive manner. Know when it is best to switch to an actual face-to-face meeting or a phone call, instead, so that business proceeds efficiently.