



## Email Messages Guide: What Do Your Emails Look Like?

Email is a critical daily mode of communication, and this guide aims to serve your transition into the language and cultural expectations of emailing in our academic community. We have identified the most common and important email advice that our community needs for sending initial emails, complex emails, and formal emails, as outlined in our [Email Messages Guide](#) resource series.

Before you continue reading, choose one or more of the following scenarios and find at least one email you have written that closely resembles that situation. If you cannot find one, you can write a sample email of your own. Then, as you read the examples, you can identify ways you might edit your email(s).

### Scenarios

- 1. Requesting a Deadline Extension:** You are unable to submit an assignment by the due date. You also cannot meet with your professor in person to ask for an extension before the deadline. For this reason, you need to send your professor an email asking for a deadline extension as soon as possible.
- 2. Requesting a Letter of Recommendation:** You are applying for a job in your home country. You need a letter of recommendation as part of the application package. You need to send an email to a professor that you have worked with during your time at Vanderbilt to ask for a letter of recommendation on your behalf.
- 3. Making an Appointment:** You are concerned about your progress in one of your classes. You need to meet with your professor to discuss the course materials and your overall progress in the class. Unfortunately, you are not available during the professor's regular office hours, so you need to email them to see if he has another time available to meet outside of class.
- 4. Inquiring about Research:** You are particularly interested in working more closely with a faculty member on campus, and they have recommended an article for you to read, but you are having trouble seeing the connection to your work. The next step is to write the professor and schedule a meeting to explain your problem and discuss the research topic.
- 5. Seeking Clarification from a Lecturer:** You left a lecture on campus feeling confused. However, the topic area is connected to your research focus, so you would like to get clarification. You have never met the speaker before, but you decide to email them to follow up.

Now that you have found (or written) at least one email fitting our scenario(s), you can read further and see if you have met emailing expectations in the US academic context. Next, you will see sample emails that resemble these scenarios and you can use them to continue editing your emails.

### Example Emails

In your academic and professional life, the reasons you write emails are often not as clear as the examples on page 1. You may have multiple needs, or a situation is complex because of your position in the department or your former communications with the recipient.

The following sample emails exemplify such complex scenarios and interweave the advice given throughout the our [Email Messages Guide](#) resource series. The examples and commentary can help you develop a sense for how to adapt the

advice in this resource to fit the complex situations you encounter as well as edit email length, structure, and language in your context.

### Example 1

Imagine you have been sick and missed several classes. Now you need an extension on an assignment. In this case, acknowledging your absences and affirming your interest in the material is a great way to show the professor that you care about the class and are a diligent student.

**Specific and concise subject line** → Extension Request

To: doctor.kinder@example.edu x  
Cc:  
From: Student Name <student.name@example.edu> Bcc:  
Subject: Extension Request

**Begin with an apology and an appropriate excuse. This email includes the extension request with a specific and realistic timeline for handing in the assignment** → Dear Dr. Kinder,  
I'm sorry for not writing earlier, but I have not been well. For this reason, I have been unable to complete the assignment on time. I would appreciate it if you could grant me an extension on this project. I'm sure I can have it ready by Monday morning.

**Acknowledging your low attendance signals that you take responsibility for your actions** → I am aware that my attendance has been impacted by this and by previous absences this semester. I would appreciate an opportunity to explain the circumstances surrounding my absences in person. I am concerned that my absences not reflect a lack of interest on my part.

**This polite conclusion also shows your consideration for the professor's busy schedule** → I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

**This more formal closing is appropriate because the content of the email is serious** → Sincerely,  
Student  
--

**Signature Block** → Student Name  
Vanderbilt University  
Graduate Program in Economic Development  
Expected Graduation, May 2022  
student.name@example.edu  
+1 (555) 234 - 5678  
*Preferred Pronouns: he, him, his*

**This greeting is formal because even though you know the professor, this email discusses a serious subject matter** → Dear Dr. Kinder,

**Because your previous absences involve a more sensitive personal matter, requesting a face-to-face meeting is appropriate** → I am concerned that my absences not reflect a lack of interest on my part.

**Tip: Try not to make your emails too complicated. Notice that this email does not suggest meeting times, as it would sound presumptive to suggest times before the professor has granted the extension and meeting request. After the professor agrees to these suggestions, the next email can schedule the meeting** → I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

**Send**

### Example 2

Imagine you are requesting a letter of recommendation from your lab supervisor, but the deadline is short, which makes writing the letter inconvenient. You work with Prof. Sousa regularly, but making a formal and difficult request requires a more polite and formal tone than you would use in daily conversation.

**Specific and concise subject line** → Recommendation Letter Request

**Because you work with this professor daily, you can use informal greetings as established in earlier emails** → Hi Prof. Sousa,

**Tip: When asking for a letter of recommendation, it is helpful to suggest what you would like the letter to focus on** → I recently found out about a fellowship opportunity with the CDC for this summer. I was wondering if you are able to write a recommendation letter. Unfortunately, the deadline to apply is next Monday, Oct 7. I apologize for the short notice, as I know you are extremely busy. I am asking because a recommendation letter from you would help the CDC see the scope of my work in your lab, and, particularly, my contribution to the myocarditis project.

**Give enough context for the recipient to understand the importance of the letter and the reason for the short deadline** → I recently found out about a fellowship opportunity with the CDC for this summer. I was wondering if you are able to write a recommendation letter. Unfortunately, the deadline to apply is next Monday, Oct 7. I apologize for the short notice, as I know you are extremely busy. I am asking because a recommendation letter from you would help the CDC see the scope of my work in your lab, and, particularly, my contribution to the myocarditis project.

**Tip: Acknowledging the professor's busy schedule is key to showing that you are prioritizing their needs.** → I apologize for the short notice, as I know you are extremely busy. I am asking because a recommendation letter from you would help the CDC see the scope of my work in your lab, and, particularly, my contribution to the myocarditis project.

**This conclusion does not assume that the professor will write the letter** → Please let me know as soon as possible if you could assist me in this process. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

**This more casual closing is appropriate because you know the professor well** → Best,  
Student

**Signature Block** → Student Name  
Doctoral Candidate  
Vanderbilt University Medical Center  
Division of Epidemiology  
student.name@example.edu  
555-456-7890

**Send**

### Example 3

You left a recent lecture on campus feeling confused. However, the topic area is connected to your research focus, so you would like to get clarification. You decide to email the speaker to follow up and ask for a meeting because developing a relationship with this professor could be a promising networking opportunity.

**Specific and concise subject line** → RAF Lecture: Appointment Request

**This more formal greeting is appropriate because you have not met this professor in person** → Dear Professor Weber,

**When explaining your question, be clear and specific to show the recipient that you have carefully considered the topic** → I am an MA candidate in the Department of German, Russian and East European Studies and my thesis advisor, Dr. Wagner, recommended I attend your lecture about the dissolution of the Red Army Faction. I am having trouble following an essential connection, namely Chancellor Schmidt's responses during the trial of the RAF leaders.

**The conclusion does not assume that the recipient will be willing to meet** → I realize your time is valuable, and I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and discuss the trial, as it directly connects to my thesis research. I am available any time after 2pm next Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

**This more formal closing is appropriate because you do not know the professor** → Thank you for considering my request, and I look forward to hearing from you.

**Signature Block** → Sincerely,  
Student Name  
--  
Student Name  
Vanderbilt University  
MA Candidate  
German, Russian and East European Studies  
student.name@example.edu  
(555) 123 - 4567

**As you have never met this recipient, it is important to refer to a common ground. In this case, you have two: the lecture you attended and the recommendation of your professor** → I am an MA candidate in the Department of German, Russian and East European Studies and my thesis advisor, Dr. Wagner, recommended I attend your lecture about the dissolution of the Red Army Faction.

**You have recognized the professor's busy schedule in two ways. First, by mentioning the value of their time and then, by directly connecting the request to your research, which shows that it is not a frivolous meeting** → I realize your time is valuable, and I would greatly appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and discuss the trial, as it directly connects to my thesis research.

**Send**

### Summary

Our Email Messages Guide resource series was developed as a way to provide English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners the opportunity to better write and edit emails.

We hope this guide will provide you with strategies for more productive email communication. If you have questions, please contact [elc@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:elc@vanderbilt.edu).

**Find this guide and more online at:** <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/resources/email-messages-guide/>