

Section 5: Establishing Good Communication

Mentors – Tips and Templates

Whether you're writing to a mentor or a professor to make an appointment, ask for an extension, or look for a research opportunity, your emails to professionals should be clear, polite, and to the point. While we recommend being your authentic self, it is helpful to have a template to help you get started.

Below are some guidelines for how to make a good impression over email.

**Adapted from Stanford Academic Advising 2022 and Villanova University M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing: LEAD Professional Development Program*

Email Etiquette

Keep your email professional!

If you're emailing a mentor or professor for the first time, it's better to err on the side of being too formal rather than too casual. If they prefer that you use their first name, they will let you know. Follow these rules of basic email etiquette:

- Begin with a greeting and address your recipient by title and last name:
 - *Dear Dr., Mr., Ms., Professor Last Name* (spell names correctly)
- Pay attention to pronouns (this is for emailing anyone)
- Use the subject line to provide a short description about the topic.
- Keep the tone of your email courteous and briefly introduce yourself, do not assume the person remembers you.
- Keep message simple– state purpose in first two sentences.
- When typing, avoid...
 - All capital letters which is interpreted as yelling or all small case letters that appear uninterested.
 - Avoid shortcuts to real words (4 U instead of “for you” or Gr8 for “great”), emoticons, or slang
 - Use full sentences and proper grammar, avoiding slang and emojis.
- End with a concluding phrase and your name
 - *Sincerely, Student's Name*
 - *Best Regards, Student's Name*
- Include your signature with your contact information.
- Use spell check and re-read before sending.

Stay brief and to the point!

Long emails often get ignored until the recipient has time to deal with them. Your email should focus on a specific item, such as setting up a time to meet or informing your mentor or professor of an upcoming absence. If you need to talk about something more involved, it is probably better to make an appointment to meet in person unless your mentor or professor tells you otherwise.

Email Signature

- Include essential information such as your name, major, College, Program or Track, and expected graduation year.
- Limit your signature to 3 or 4 lines. Use colons or pipes to separate information.
- Include your preferred email address and phone number.
- Include links to your social media accounts such LinkedIn and Twitter
 - Make sure these are accounts with a professional message.
- Avoid fancy fonts, colors, graphics, and inspirational quotes.

EXAMPLE:

Name
Major | College, Program, or Track
Class of ____ (Expected Graduation Year)
Email Address:
Phone Number:

Reply in a timely fashion!

Your mentors and professors appreciate a prompt reply just as much as you do. If a mentor or faculty member asks you for something that will take some time (for example, a report on your progress in the lab), reply quickly to confirm that you're working on the task and provide a timeline for completion. They appreciate acknowledging receipt of an email (Simply, reply that you have received the email and will follow up).

- Check your email regularly and respond to requests for information within 24-48 hours if possible (remember to check Junk Email and Spam folders)
- Use the Cc: field only for those who you are including for informational purposes vs. To: field for those whom you are addressing and do not "Reply all" unless every person on the chain needs to know
- Provide a warning when sending a large attachment or ask if the person in advance for a convenient time to send an attachment so the person can download the file to avoid clogging their inbox limit.
- If you are upset, delay responding until you can express yourself appropriately.
- Be cautious with humor – can get lost in translation.
- Use a professional email address such as first and last name.
 - Not sweet_darling_nikki@yahoo.com or cutie_pie_98@Hotmail.com

Missing Meetings

Maybe you've been sick and have been missing scheduled meetings, or maybe you're dealing with an unexpected emergency. Whatever your circumstances, communication is key! It is best to inform your mentors of your situation as soon as you can and ask if they can reschedule your

meeting in accordance with their availability and preferred method of contact (text, phone call, email, etc.)

Briefly explain your situation-- *you don't have to give details if it makes you uncomfortable and you are not required to disclose any personal or sensitive information.* Provide alternative times/dates for another meeting or request their availability.

Remember that your mentors are human too (and were nursing students!). They are willing to help you, just keep the doors of communication open.

Emailing with your Mentor

As you develop relationships with your mentor, pay close attention to their communication styles. Especially if you are working with faculty on tangible outcomes (for example, teaching assistant assignment or presentation), it's a good idea to explicitly discuss communication preferences.

Here are some questions you might consider when thinking about a mentor's communication style:

- Does this mentor respond to emails quickly or is it better to call or stop by office hours for quick responses?
- How formal is the mentor in written communication?
- What sorts of questions or topics can be resolved by email, and which require meeting in person?
- Are there situations where a phone or zoom meeting might be preferable?
- Please remember it is important for you to also set boundaries. If you prefer not to answer over weekends or late evenings, do not feel obligated unless there is an urgent situation.
- Some mentors prefer to text with mentees, which is acceptable if mutually agreed upon.

Regardless of your mentor's style, it will benefit you to be the active, responsible party in organizing one-on-one communication. Reach out, respond promptly, and remember to keep your emails short, specific, and courteous.

How to Disagree Professionally

- Stay calm!
 - Helps you to manage the conversation
 - Do not make it personal (you disagree with the concept, not the person)
 - Do not put down the other person's ideas or make derogatory comments
- Listen
 - Permits repetition of key points when you make your case
 - Look for where you agree as a starting point
- Acknowledge their opinion
 - "That is a valid/ fair point, yet at the same time..."
 - "I see what you are saying, what about looking at it this way..."
 - "I respect your point yet from my perspective..."
- Put the other person at ease

- Use “I” statements (less argumentative than “you”)
- Pretend to be unsure about disagreeing
 - “I’m not sure I agree with you about this”, “I do not think that we have the same opinion on this issue.”
- If worried about the topic being challenging, ask if you can comment or present an alternative viewpoint for consideration
- Take a breath to give the person space to respond and let emotions settle
- Instead of saying they are wrong, add a reason why another idea may be correct
 - “An alternative might be...”
 - “Another way to view this may be...”
 - “I definitely think you’re on the right track. What if, instead, you...”
- Focus on facts and logic rather than opinion
- Know when to move on
 - You acknowledge that you will never agree and enable you both to move on to discussing other issues
 - “Let’s agree to disagree”

Additional Resources:

- Inc.com – 6 Smart Ways to Disagree With Someone Respectfully at <https://www.inc.com/kat-boogaard/6-key-tips-to-respectfully-disagree-with-someone.html>
- Harvard Business Review “How to Disagree with Someone More Powerful Than You” at <https://hbr.org/2016/03/how-to-disagree-with-someone-more-powerful-than-you>

Forbes.com – Nine Tips to Politely Disagree with a Colleague (And Keep a Positive Work Relationship) at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2021/05/13/nine-tips-to-politely-disagree-with-a-colleague-and-keep-a-positive-work-relationship/?sh=633a14afe31d>

Introductory Email to Mentor (Template)

If you’re having trouble drafting an introductory email to your mentor, here is an email template.

**Adapted from the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Undergraduate Mentoring Program*

Dear _____,

My name is _____, and I was informed we were matched in the PA-ACCEL Mentorship Program.

Thank your mentor for volunteering to coach and guide students: (Thank you for participating as a mentor in the PA-ACCEL Mentorship Program, I am very fortunate to have you as a mentor match!)

Tell your mentor how you heard about the program: (I am a nursing student at _____.) (I heard about the program as a nursing student and recipient of the Healthcare Scholars Scholarship Program at [Your University])

Tell your mentor about yourself: (A little bit about myself: I am a junior majoring in nursing. Outside of classes I volunteer with the Chemistry club/ church/ etc. I am also involved in church/ university dance club/ student association/etc. I enjoy spending my free time at the beach or with friends.)

Tell your mentor what you want to get out of the program and mention something that interested you from their profile. (I look forward to participating in the mentorship program and learning about different career paths available in the field of nursing/or hear your suggestions of how I can best prepare for the professional world while at _____ (university, program). I am interested in hearing more about what you do at _____ (mentor's current position or information from resume/profile.)

I look forward to meeting you. The PA-ACCEL Program Support Team suggested that the first step is for us to schedule our Preliminary meeting to go over a meeting/communication plan and to discuss expectations and goals for our mentoring relationship. I look forward to hearing from you to arrange a time to talk.)

My contact information is (###) ###-#### and _____(email).

Thank you again being my mentor!

Sincerely,

First and Last Name

EMAIL SIGNATURE

How to Write a Thank You Note

- Write a handwritten or typed "Thank You" note after:
 - Interviews
 - A dinner party
 - An overnight visit
 - A funeral (for flowers, donation, or food)
 - Receiving a gift (by itself or for an event)
 - Being the recipient of a good deed
- Write the letter as soon as possible after the interview, receiving the gift or kind deed
- In business, use their formal title (Dr., Ms.)
- Thank them for the item (be specific), action, service, time or consideration
- Be specific about what you are thanking the person for:
 - Be specific about something you learned or discussed in the interview
 - Refer to the discussion about why you are the best candidate
 - How the gift will be used or why it or an action was particularly special to you
- Closing
 - Offer to answer additional questions, look forward to hearing from you
 - Personal comment on their thoughtfulness, kindness, specialness to you
- Keep it brief (no more than 2 paragraphs)/ Check grammar and spelling
- Use nice paper rather than an email (when possible)
- If typed, handwrite your name

Additional Resources:

How to Write a Nursing Interview Thank You Letter (with sample) from Indeed.com

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/how-to-write-a-nursing-interview-thank-you-letter>