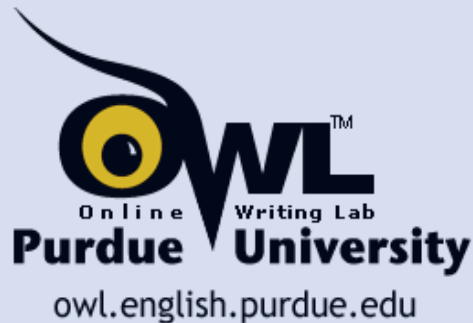# Email Etiquette for Professors

Why is Email Etiquette Important?

- Audiences interact with the printed word as though it has a personality and that personality makes positive and negative impressions upon us.

- Without immediate feedback, your document can be misinterpreted by your students, so it is crucial that you follow the basic rules of etiquette to construct an appropriate tone.

The Elements of Email Etiquette

- General format
- Writing long messages
- Attachments
- The curse of surprises
- Delivering information about assignments
- Delivering bad news
- Electronic Mailing lists

Information to Give Your Students

- Be clear with your students about whether they can contact you via email or not.
- Tell them what kinds of subjects you are willing to deal with via email in case you have some restrictions.
- If you have cut off times for when you will respond to an email, inform your students about those times.
- Seek consent from students before discussing their emails in the classroom.
- FERPA: http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html

General Format: The Basics

- Write a salutation for each new subject email.
- Try to keep the email brief (one screen length).
- Return emails within the same time you would a phone call.
- Check for punctuation, spelling, and grammatical errors.
- Use caps when appropriate.
- Format your email for plain text rather than HTML.
- Use a font that has a professional or neutral look.

General Format: Lists and Bullets

- When you are writing directions or want to emphasize important points, number your directions or bullet your main points.

- For example,

  1) Place a paper in drawer A.

  2) Click the green "start" button.

Another example,

- Improve customer satisfaction.

- Empower employees.

General Format: Tone

- Write in a positive tone "When you complete the report." instead of "If you complete the report."
- Avoid negative words that begin with "un, non, ex" or that end with "less" (useless, non-existent, ex-employee, undecided).
- Use smiles ☺, winks ;), and other graphical symbols only when appropriate.
- Use contractions to add a friendly tone. (don't, won't, can't).

General Format: Addresses

- Avoid sending emails to more than four addresses at once.

- Instead, create a mailing list for your class so that students do not have to scroll too much before getting to the actual message.

- To: maillist4@cs.com

Responding to a Student Complaint

- Empathize with the student's frustration and tell the student he or she is right if that is true.

- If you feel you are right, thank the student for bringing the matter to your attention.

- Explain what led to the problem in question.

- Avoid getting bogged down by details and minor arguments.

- If you are aware that the situation is in the process of being resolved, let the student know at the top of the response.

- Apologize if necessary.

Attachments

- When you are sending an attachment, tell your respondent what the name of the file is, what program it is saved in, and the version of the program.

- "This file is in MS Word 2007 under the name 'LabFile'."

General Tips for Electronic Mailing Lists

- Avoid discussing private concerns and issues.

- It is okay to address someone directly on the list.

    - Ex: "Hi Leslie, regarding your question…"

- Change the subject heading to match the content of your message.

- When conflict arises on the list speak in person with the one with whom you are in conflict.

When Your Message is Long

- Create an "elevator" summary.

- Provide a table of contents on the first screen of your email.

- If you require a response from the reader then be sure to request that response in the first paragraph of your email.

- Create headings for each major section.

Elevator Summary and Table of Contents

- An elevator summary should have all the main components of the email.
  - "Our profit margin for the last quarter went down 5%. As a result I am proposing budget adjustments for the following areas…"

- Table of contents
  - "This email contains
    - A. Budget projections for the last quarter
    - B. Actual performance for the last quarter
    - C. Adjustment proposal
    - D. Projected profitability"

Delivering Information About Assignments, Projects, Classes

- Include an elevator summary and table of contents with headings.

- Provide as much information as possible.

Do Not Spring Assignments on Your Students Via Email

- Introduce an assignment to students in class and then reinforce the assignment by sending an email with further information.

- Do not announce the assignment for the first time in an email. Some people may not receive the message.

Delivering Bad News

- Deliver the news up front.

- Avoid blaming statements.

- Maintain a positive resolve.

Delivering Bad News

- Deliver the news up front:

  - "Based on your low attendance rate and your low scores on assignment in this class, you may not pass the course. Please see me during office hours to discuss this further."

- Avoid lengthy emails on serious topics:

  - Get to the point and set up a meeting. Remember that college is a time for learning from success and mistakes. Allow for both and try to mentor students in person.

For More Information

- Contact the Purdue University Writing Lab with questions about email etiquette.
  - Drop In: Heavilon 226
  - Call: 43723
  - Email: owl@owl.english.purdue.edu
  - On the web: http://owl.english.purdue.edu

The End