

Professional emails

Writing a professional email is an important skill to have and it is likely you will need to write emails in your job after graduation. You may also need to write professional emails as part of your course requirements.

Professional emails have a purpose (e.g., to inform, to invite, to apply, to request an action) and should be written in formal language that is concise and clear. You do not want to waste the recipient's time so you should mention the reason for your email as soon as possible and keep your email as brief as possible. Professional emails tend to have a set format which may include contact information for both the sender and recipient, a concise and informative subject line, formal greeting and farewell phrases, and a professional tone and language.

Professional tone

As with academic writing, a professional email should use formal language with correct grammar and punctuation.

- Use formal salutations and closing phrases- colloquial expressions such as “Hey, how’s it going?” or “Take it easy” should not be used. If you have met the recipient before and you have their permission, use their first name- otherwise, use their surname.
Note: if you are unsure of marital status, use “Ms” to address women; this can be used for both married and unmarried women.
- Pay attention to punctuation and capitalisation. Using all capital letters is viewed by some as shouting.
- Do not use contractions (e.g., don’t, I’m)- it is more formal to write words in full (e.g., do not, I am).
- Do not use emojis or emoticons- these detract from a professional tone.
- Make sure you proofread your email several times before sending- nothing is more unprofessional than spelling mistakes and poor grammar.

Contact information

There is flexibility in how to format a professional email. If you are writing a professional email as part of an assignment then it is strongly recommended you check your course guide, or with your lecturer, for guidance about format.

In a traditional letter, it is customary to include your physical address and telephone number (and an optional email address), the date, and the recipient's address and telephone number (and an optional email address) in this order, at the top of the page. Some people may centre, or align to the right, their address. Often professional emails will follow this format. Sometimes, your address will be omitted, particularly if your contact details are included as part of your set email signature or is simply given under your name at the end of the email.

Generally, you do not give either your email address or the recipient's email address as this is evident in the email itself. Similarly, the date is generally not necessary as this is also evident in the email itself.

Ideally, you want an email address that sounds professional. Often businesses will assign staff an organisational email. However, if you are using your personal email that involves rude or colloquial words, or nicknames, you might want to consider creating a new, more professional-sounding email address. An email that includes your name is a good idea, particularly if you are applying for a position. This might help your email avoid being marked as spam.

Subject line

Most people get spam (unasked for email usually selling something, or with malware), so a clear, attention-grabbing, subject line can be the difference between being read and being sent straight to the trash.

It is important to keep your subject line succinct and clear. Your subject line should clearly tell the reader what the email is about; this can help generate interest in your email and help the reader decide whether your email is spam or not, and how urgent and relevant it is.

For example, if you are emailing a report about sales figures in the 3rd quarter, instead of writing a one word subject line such as "Sales" or "Report," have a subject line more detailed and focused, such as "3rd quarter sales figures as requested." You can also signal urgency with a phrase such as "Response required by Dec. 2."

Subject lines such as "Important!", "Urgent!", or "For your review", and subject lines with exclamation or question marks should be avoided as they are commonly used in spam. Ideally, your subject line should include something that the recipient will recognise so they will not mark it as spam. For example, "Response to query about health and safety protocols."

If you are applying for a job, state the job title in the subject line so your email will not be mistaken for spam. Often job descriptions will tell you how to address your email so it is a good idea to check if this is the case.

Pay attention to spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. Using all capital letters is viewed by some as shouting- it can look unprofessional, and your email may be mistaken for spam.

Salutation

Professional emails should use a formal salutation. If you have met the recipient before and they have indicated it is okay, use their first name- otherwise, use their surname. Use professional titles if appropriate (e.g., Dr, Professor).

Note: if you are unsure of marital status, use "Ms" to address women; this can be used for both married and unmarried women:

- Dear Dr Jones,
- Dear Ms Appleby,
- Tēnā koe, (formal hello for 1 person)
- Tēnā kōrua, (formal hello for 2 people)
- Tēnā koutou, (formal hello for 3 or more people)
- Kei te rangatira, tēnā koe, (Dear Sir/Madam; very formal)

If you have met or written to the recipient before, you might want to include a brief pleasantry. Your pleasantry can help remind the recipient who you are:

- I hope all is well with you.
- Thank you for your prompt reply.
- It was a pleasure to meet you at the conference last week and discuss...
- I enjoyed speaking with you on the phone yesterday and am writing in response to this conversation about...

If you do not know the recipient's name, use a formal, non-specific, salutation:

- To whom it may concern,
- Dear Sir/Madam,

Email body

In a professional email, it is important to be concise so you need to make clear immediately the reason for writing:

- I am writing in response to your query on June 3, 2018 about....
- I am writing to enquire about...
- Please find attached the completed report on....
- As requested, I have finished...

Ideally, each paragraph should have a single point or focus that explains, or details, your reason for writing. Often, emails finish with a call to action or a request for some kind of response:

- Thank you for your attention and I look forward to your response.
- Please let me know as soon as possible if you would like to proceed with...
- I would appreciate it if you could send the requested information by the end of the week.
- If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.
- I appreciate you taking the time to read this and hopefully I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Closure

Sometimes, emails simply conclude with a thank you and good bye:

- Thank you and best regards,
Joan Smith.

Alternative closing phrases include:

- Yours sincerely,
- All the best,
- Nāku noa, nā, (Yours sincerely; one signatory)
- Ngā manaakitanga, (With best wishes)
- Ngā mihi, (Regards)
- Kia ora rawa atu, (Many thanks)

You might also want to include a signature that is part of your email template. Often a signature is a different font colour and style and set slightly after your email. Usually an email signature will include your name, job title, contact information and links to any relevant information (e.g., website, social media accounts). Email service providers vary in how to set up a signature and information about how to do this is readily available online.

Academic writing and study skills support

1. Academic Q+A

If you have a quick question about study skills or academic writing, then they can ask it on the [Academic Q+A forum](#), which can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

2. Consultations

One-to-one consultations with learning advisors and writing consultants are [available online and on campus](#). Consultants can answer your questions about academic writing and study skills or give you feedback on your assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, presentation, use of sources, and referencing.

3. Online Writing and Learning Link (OWLL)

Develop your academic writing and study skills with the [Online Writing and Learning Link \(OWLL\)](#) from Massey University. OWLL includes information on assignment writing, assignment types, referencing, study skills, and exam skills.

4. Pre-reading Service

The [Pre-reading Service](#) is a free service, which gives students an opportunity to send their draft assignment to [CLS consultants](#) for review and advice. Students receive individual written feedback on their assignment's structure, focus, paragraph structure, flow, style, presentation, referencing, and use of sources. The service can be accessed via the [Academic Support Stream site](#).

5. Workshops

Free study seminars and workshops are run on campus and online. See [Workshops page on OWLL](#) for [programmes and registration details](#).