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## Writing a Professional Email: Netiquette

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Writing Boot Camp Unit  
Email and Netiquette Lesson

### Writing a Professional Email: Netiquette

**Abstract:**

This lesson instructs students on the basic of Internet etiquette, and allows them to practice writing a professional email, such as the type they would send to teachers, professors, or employers.

This lesson can take 40-70 minutes, depending on the size of your class.

**Procedure:**

1. Have the class review aloud the attached document, “Writing a Professional E-mail (and other bits of Netiquette).”
2. Show some examples of old student emails (you know you’ve saved some), preferably copy-pasted into a Word file. Be sure that any identifying features such as email address and name have been removed. Allow the class to identify and point out the mistakes. If you’re not comfortable with that, I’m confident you can find examples of bad emails on the Internet with a little help from Google.
3. Put the students into pairs.
4. Have each one write an email to the other with the following scenario:  
“You’re going to college and will have to miss a class because (a) you’re sick or (b) you feel like sleeping in.”

Each email should contain *at least three mistakes* of etiquette from the worksheet/discussion.

5. If your classroom or lab has access to the technology, have your students send their emails to each other. Then have each revise and “fix” the email he/she receives before sending it back to its originator and/or posting it.
6. If your classroom or lab has access to the technology, show a few of the funnier “before-and-after” examples.

**Materials:**

A projector and computer, and preferably a lab or classroom in which the students will have computer and email access.

## Writing a Professional E-mail (and other bits of Netiquette)

### What is a “Professional E-mail?”

Any e-mail that you send to a professor, supervisor, staff, or potential employer is a professional e-mail, and should be composed differently than one sent to your parents or friends. Professional e-mails are also much different than text messages or instant-messaging.

### What are some common mistakes?

Generally speaking, students make mistakes by being too *informal*. Even if your boss or teacher talks, acts, or writes informally, your written correspondence with him/her should not assume that tone. Avoid the following common mistakes:

- Using emoticons, such as ☺ or ;)
- Using informal abbreviations (“TTYL” or “BTW,” for example)
- Using no capitalization or punctuation (“im excited to go to Chicago for this job.”).
- Not spelling words, or misspelling them (“I’m exited 2 go 2 Chicago 4 this job.”)
- Taking on an informal tone (“this assignment sucks and I don’t get it.”)
- Using all capital letters – it looks like “yelling” to your reader and can be hard to read.

### What general rules make for a strong professional e-mail?

- **Write a simple message in your subject line – *never* leave it blank.** A good subject is simple and *makes your reason for writing obvious to the reader*. It might be “My absence from ENG 103 sec.G21 on Wednesday” or “Question on Friday’s Lecture.” A poor subject might be “hey” or “absent.” If you really are stuck for a subject line, put your full name and your course and section, like “John Smith, ENG 104 Sec M12”).
- **Include a greeting.** Your professional e-mail should start like a formal letter, with a “Dear Mr. K:” If you don’t know who is going to receive your email (as is sometimes the case in applying for jobs or colleges), begin it “To Whom it May Concern:”
- **Include a closing and signature.** Many of your college professors will have 2-5 courses they teach, and between 50 and over 200 students. Don’t expect them to know who you are based on how you write. A simple closing with your full name is best, and it’s usually a good idea to include your course section and/or time:  
“Thanks,  
John Smith  
Eng 103 Sec G21 (10 AM)”
- **Proofread.** At the minimum, use a spellchecker. But remember that spellcheckers don’t catch mistakes like missing words. *Carefully* reread your e-mail – a sloppy e-mail tells a professor or employer that you just don’t care much about passing his class or getting that job.
- **Be aware of the message your e-mail address sends.** Don’t expect to be taken seriously by a professor or employer if your contact is listed as “superstud69@aol.com” or “SweetHotty4Uxoxo@comcast.net.”
- **Pay attention to your tone.** E-mail doesn’t convey the nuances of spoken conversation, such as voice inflection or body language. It is thus often easy to misinterpret. Sarcasm, especially, can be hard to detect, even if you’re writing to someone who knows you well.
- **Be as concise as possible.** Professors and employers are very busy, and often have many emails to answer. They will appreciate you quickly and clearly making your point.

from “E-mail Etiquette: A Quick Guide to Writing a Professional E-mail” by Carrie Payne  
[[http://www.jobweb.com/Resources/Library/Correspondence\\_for\\_the\\_Job/Email\\_Etiquette\\_A\\_209\\_01.htm](http://www.jobweb.com/Resources/Library/Correspondence_for_the_Job/Email_Etiquette_A_209_01.htm)]