Communicating With Instructors

Building strong communication skills with your professors is one of the most valuable steps you can take in college. Whether you're asking questions, writing emails, or visiting office hours, professional communication shows your engagement and can directly impact your success. In fact, research shows that each visit to office hours can increase your final grade by about 1.3% (Guerrero & Rod, 2013).

This worksheet will help you practice simple but effective strategies for connecting with your instructors in a clear, respectful, and confident way.

Why is communication so important?

- Boosts grades by helping you better understand course material and expectations.
- Builds strong relationships that can lead to mentorship and opportunities.
- Strengthens communication skills needed for future academic and career success.

Getting Started

Knowing when and how to email your professor is essential for getting timely help, acting professionaly, and making a strong academic impression.

WHEN SHOULD I EMAIL MY INSTRUCTOR?	WHEN SHOULD I MEET WITH MY INSTRUCTOR?
To request or schedule an appointment, clarify deadlines, or ask about office hours.	When you need in-depth help understanding complex material or key course concepts.
When you have a quick question that doesn't require a long or detailed answer.	When discussing grades, academic progress, or personal challenges affecting school.
If it's outside normal school hours **and the issue <u>can</u> wait until morning.**	When you're available during office hours and want a focused, one-on-one meeting.

Tips for emailing your instructor:

- Use your resources (class syllabus, Canvas, bsu.edu) to find the info **<u>before</u>** emailing your instructor
- Use your Ball State email address
  - Check this often
- Make your subject line clear & specific
- Start with "Dear Professor (Last Name),"
  - Use "Dr." when appropriate
- Be concise and respectful in your request.
- Be patient in waiting for a response
- Always thank your instructor after you have received clarification

Tips for emailing your instructor:

- Use your resources (class syllabus, Canvas, bsu.edu) to find the info **<u>before</u>** setting an appointment your instructor.
- Know the appropriate times to meet and arrive on time (check for office hours on the syllabus or set up a meeting via Navigate)
- Prepare specific topics you want to discuss or questions you need to ask.
- If discussing your grade, ask for additional resources or how you can improve.
- Take notes and summarize action steps
- Thank your instructor for their time

College is great practice for the professional world—especially when it comes to communication. Just like you'll need to email supervisors, attend meetings, and advocate for yourself in a career, learning to communicate clearly and respectfully with your professors now helps build those same skills. Every email you send and office visit you make is a step toward becoming a more confident, capable professional.

Write a Sample Email

Read over the example and use the space provided to write an email to one of your professors.

From: charlie.cardinal@bsu.edu
Subject: Question About Upcoming Assignment

Dear Dr. Beneficence
I hope you're doing well.

I had a quick question about the paper that's due next Monday. I want to make sure I understand the expectations correctly. Should we be using at least three sources, or is five still the requirement listed in the syllabus?

Thank you for your time, and I appreciate your help.

Best,
Charlie Cardinal
COMM 210 - Section 3

Subject: _____

Dear_____,

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Before You Hit Send

Use this checklist after you have drafted your email and before you send it to your instructor:

- ☐ Check your syllabus and Canvas one more time to ensure the answer to your question can't be found there
- ☐ Does your subject clearly state the purpose (e.g., "Question About Assignment")
- ☐ Did you address your professor respectfully? Is your message clear, concise, and respectful in tone? This email will be forever, so avoid making demands or complaining.
- ☐ Did you proofread your email? Check for typos and avoid text-speak or slang? Also, ensure you wrote in coherent and complete sentences.

Prepare for your Meeting

Before your meeting, take a few minutes to write down a list of topics or questions you want to discuss with your professor. This will help you stay focused, make the most of your time, and ensure you don't forget anything important.

During the meeting with my professor, I would like to discuss...

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Guerrero, M., & Rod, A. B. (2013). Engaging in office hours: A study of student-faculty interaction and academic performance. Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 15(3), 287–302. During the meeting with my professor, I would like to discuss...

This document was adapted from resources from Clemson University Acadmeic Success Center