

Communications Guidelines

Communicating on a professional level is very different from communicating from student-to-instructor in a classroom or course setting. Sometimes students need support when transitioning to a professional communications role. This support is less about what types of communications to use, as covered in introductory communications courses, and more about the expected etiquette and conventions of communicating in the workplace.

Communication Conventions

Responsiveness

Students are balancing high academic workloads alongside their professional obligations. At times, they may need prompting to maintain the response times that are expected in the workplace. Collaborating with the student groups to create an agreed-upon response time (for instance, within 3 days during the week) can help students understand the need for timely responses while balancing their academic commitments.

Keep in mind that students may be working hours outside of the typical 9-to-5 in order to attend their classes. You may receive emails over the weekend or later in the evening. Establish how you will respond to them (e.g., weekend emails will be responded to on Monday morning unless very urgent), and what constitutes an emergency or urgent situation that demands an immediate response.

Email Greetings and Sign-offs

Establishing professional email greetings and sign-offs may seem a bit obvious at first. However, students often are unfamiliar with expectations for a more formal email greeting, especially when communicating with clients and others at first. Encourage them to use a standard greeting (e.g., 'Good morning, Professor X') and a professional tone when writing emails. As the client-worker relationship progresses, students may progress to using clients' first names, if permission is given by the client.

Reducing the Number of Emails

We could all use support in keeping our inboxes tidy. Students can help their clients and colleagues by consciously trying to reduce the number of emails sent to any one individual in a given day. This can be done by trying to put all questions in a single email (usually numbered for clarity) and ensuring they answer everything possible when responding, rather than emailing responses one-by-one.



Calendar Invites

Using calendar invitations (through various email clients) is relatively unheard of when communicating with peers. Students need to understand that for many professionals, a meeting doesn't really exist until a calendar invite has been sent and accepted. Even when negotiating meeting times with others, encourage students to ensure a follow-up calendar invitation is sent quickly after the time has been agreed upon. Help them understand that faculty and staff calendars fill up quickly.

Using Other Communication Apps

Students find email a much slower form of communication compared to texting and group chats. They may form groups in apps like Discord or WhatsApp to further communicate, especially if they work odd hours or are virtual much of the time. You may need to establish communication guidelines for these apps to ensure professionalism is maintained. Discuss as a group what should be communicated in an email (e.g., questions that need to be recorded, official project-related communications) versus in the group chat (e.g., questions for problem-solving purposes, team-building communications).