

Academic English: Writing Emails

TASK 1a Look at the email below, which an international applicant sent to the university's international office. Match the words from the box and the elements of the email (1-8).

recipient (a) – subject line (b) – sender (c) – signature (d) – closing line (e) – salutation (f) – attachment (g) – body (h)

The screenshot shows an email interface with the following elements and corresponding numbered boxes:

- 1:** Sender's email address: teddybearheartlove1996@gmail.com
- 2:** Subject line: Study
- 3:** Recipient: International Office
- 4:** Attachment: Scan.pdf (2 MB)
- 5:** Salutation: Hello
- 6:** Body text: i am masod eager to study at your university plz help 😊
- 7:** Closing line: Bye
- 8:** Signature: masod

1b With a partner, discuss how Masod could improve his email. Then share your ideas in class.

1c Now read the following extracts from three students' emails and discuss with a partner:

- Why is the student writing to the professor?
- What is he / she doing wrong?

[1] "I just found out that I got a C- on my final??? Are you kidding me?! I studied for a week for that exam and I think I deserve a B+ at least?!?"

[2] "I'm applying for a scholarship and I just saw that I need a letter of recommendation from a prof. Please write it & email it to me by tomorrow morning, don't wanna miss the deadline."

[3] "I'm sorry I missed yesterday's quiz, but I was really sick. I was stung by some insect (don't know exactly what it was) and I think I had some kind of allergic reaction. I threw up five times and I had this horrible rash, it's still super itchy (I'm attaching a photo along with the medical certificate). I was glad I could eat some soup today and keep it down. Anyway, can I take a make-up quiz? Hope you're doing well."

[4] „Hi Professor Smith, I had to leave class early last week, so I don't know what we have to do for homework for tomorrow. Could you tell me?"

TASK 2a Email etiquette. Tick the correct answer(s) to the questions (there may be more than one correct answer). Afterwards, discuss your answers in class and explain your choices. You can find the answers below.

1. You're writing to your professor, Dr. Adam Smith.

Which email address should you use?

- a) It doesn't matter – any address will work (midnightwarrior@hotmail.com)
- b) Any first name – last name address (steve.miller@gmail.com)
- c) Your university email address (s.miller@ex-uni.edu)

3. It's the first time you are writing to a professor.

What should you do first?

- a) Say who you are.
- b) Say why you're writing.
- c) Apologize for bothering him/her.

5. Which salutation can you use when you do not know the name of the recipient?¹

- a) Dear ladies and gentlemen, ...
- b) Dear Sir or Madam, ...
- c) Dear Mr or Mrs, ...

7. You're writing an email to Professor Smith's secretary, Jane Miller (no title). What is the best way to address her?

- a) Dear Mrs. Smith, ...
- b) Dear Miss Smith, ...
- c) Dear Ms. Smith, ...

9. Which is not a correct way to say that you're sending a file with your email?

- a) Please find attached my presentation for next Thursday.
- b) I'm sending you / attaching my presentation for next Thursday as an attachment.
- c) I send you my presentation for next Thursday as an attachment.

11. Which statement about signatures is true?

- a) You should sign with your first name and last name ("Steve Miller").
- b) You do not need a signature, as your name is displayed automatically.
- c) You should sign with your last and first name ("Miller, Steve").

2b Which of the rules for writing emails in English did you already know? Which were new to you?

2. You have a question about a course assignment.

What is a good subject line for your email?

- a) "Dolphin presentation"
- b) "Presentation for Marine Biology 101, Mon. 10:00-12:00"
- c) "Question"

4. What is the best way to label an attachment?

- a) Scan.pdf
- b) Presentation.pdf
- c) Scott Miller – Presentation Marine Biology 101.pdf

6. You're writing a message to your professor, Dr. Adam Smith. What are the proper ways to address him? (more than one correct answer)

- a) Dear Adam, ...
- b) Dear Mr. Smith, ...
- c) Dear Dr. Smith, ...
- d) Dear Prof. Dr. Smith, ...
- e) Dear Professor Smith, ...

8. You've addressed the recipient of your email ("Dear Bill, ...") – how do you continue?

- a) with an uppercase letter ("Could you let me know ...")
- b) with a lowercase letter ("could you let me know ...")

10. Which closing line is the most common in professional emails?

- a) Yours faithfully, ...
- b) Best regards, ... / Best wishes, ...
- c) Lots of love, ...

12. You're writing to a group of people who don't know each other. What should you do?

- a) Add all recipients to the "to" box.
- b) Send the email to yourself and add all recipients to the "cc" box.
- c) Add all participants to the "bcc" box.

¹ Please note that it is MUCH better to do some research and find the right contact person!

TASK 3a Read the four emails below and tick the students to whom the statements apply. Some statements might apply to more than one student or to none of the students.

[1]
 FROM: j.cook@ex-university.edu
 TO: prof.adam.smith@ex-university.edu
Marine Biology 101: Conflicting schedules: midterm exam on a different day?

Dear Professor Smith,
 I am a student in your Marine Biology 101 class. I have a question regarding the midterm exam. I found out today that the midterm has been postponed to October 15, 10:00-12:00. Unfortunately, I have a doctor's appointment that day, which would be very difficult to re-schedule. Could I perhaps take the exam on a different day?
 Best regards,
 Jessica Cook

[2]
 FROM: h.ibrahim@ex-university.edu
 TO: prof.adam.smith@ex-university.edu
Marine Biology 101: New topic for term paper

Dear Professor Smith,
 As we discussed in your office hour last week, I'd like to change the topic of my term paper. I was thinking of writing about the effects of climate change on narwhal populations. I have already written an outline for the paper, which I am attaching to this email. I would really appreciate it if you could give me some feedback.
 Thanks in advance for your answer!
 Best wishes,
 Hala Ibrahim

[3]
 FROM: st.mitchell@ex-university.edu
 TO: prof.adam.smith@ex-university.edu
Marine Biology 101: Assignment for Monday, 04/04

Dear Professor Smith,
 Please find attached the fourth assignment for Marine Biology 101. I'm sorry for only handing it in today; I know that the deadline was yesterday, but I had a family emergency and did not manage to finish it on time. Will you still accept it despite the late submission?
 Kind regards,
 Steve Mitchell

[4]
 FROM: f.gonzales@ex-university.edu
 TO: prof.adam.smith@ex-university.edu
Marine Biology 101 – Question about 4th quiz

Dear Professor Smith,
 I just reviewed last week's quiz, which you returned to us today, and I do not quite understand why I got such a low grade. Could I talk to you after class or come to your office hour tomorrow to discuss my errors?
 Best regards,
 Felipe Gonzales

	Jessica	Hala	Steve	Felipe	Nobody
a) ... is unhappy with his/her test results.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) ... has talked with the professor about his/her issue before.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) ... wants to re-take his/her failed midterm.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) ... is sending the professor a file.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) ... wants to make an appointment with the professor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) ... apologizes for being late to class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) ... would rather not cancel an appointment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3b Go through the four texts again and note down useful phrases for writing emails.

TASK 4 Now please three e-mails, one to each of the following people:

To:	Why you are writing:
Professor Dr. Michael Weston, who taught one of your classes	You have a problem with your term paper, which is due next week. You've written to Professor Weston before, but he hasn't replied yet.
Jenny Smith, who works at the registrar's office	You tried to print your transcript of records, but there is a mistake in it.
Jonathan Parker, head of the international office	You have been to Mr Parker's office to get information about studying abroad. Mr Parker provided you with some brochures. Now you get back to him with some more specific questions.

- Write a full email, including
 - your address,
 - the recipient's address,
 - a properly named attachment,
 - a meaningful subject line,
 - a salutation,
 - the body of the email,
 - a closing line,
 - your signature.
- Each email should be at least five sentences, so please come up with some additional context (What is your term paper about? What exactly is the mistake? Which partner university are you interested in?).

Here are some phrases you can use:

Introducing yourself <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm a student in your ... class (Mon 10-12). - I study mechanical engineering in my first semester. - My student ID number is ... 	Stating your purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm writing to you because ... - I have a few questions regarding the assignment for next Monday. Firstly, ... secondly, ... - I wanted to tell you / to inform you / to let you know that ...
Referring back to prior correspondence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sorry for my late reply. I just read your email from last Thursday ... - Thanks for your quick reply / for getting back to me so quickly. - As we discussed last week / As I told you in my last email, I'd like to ... - 	Attachments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please find attached / enclosed ... - I am sending you ... as an attachment. - I'm attaching ...
Asking for help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I was wondering if I might ...? - I would really appreciate it if you could get back to me soon ... - Would it be possible to ...? - I was hoping you could tell me how ... - Could you give me some more information on ...? 	Closing phrases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank you for your help/consideration. - I'm looking forward to hearing back from you. - Best wishes, ... / Kind regards, ...

Vocabulary List

Parts of an email

attachment
to attach
closing
file
recipient
reply / to reply
salutation
sender
signature
subject line

Additional vocabulary

applicant
appointment
to appreciate
appropriate
assignment
to cancel
deadline
to be due
to hand in
family emergency
final (exam)
international office
letter of recommendation
medical certificate
midterm exam
office hour
outline
to postpone
presentation
proper
quiz
registrar's office
to review
to (re-)take an exam
scholarship
to (re-)schedule
to submit (a term paper)
term paper
transcript of records

Answer key

TASK 1a 1c, 2b, 3a, 4g, 5f, 6h, 7e, 8d

1b With a partner, discuss how Masod could improve his email.

- use a professional email address
- write a precise subject line (“Question about application procedure for international applicants”)
- select a proper name for the attachment (Masod Mohammad – application documents.pdf)
- address the recipient by his/her name
- mind proper spelling and punctuation
- not use emoticons
- use a proper closing line
- sign with his first and last name

1c

[1] The student’s tone is very rude due to his/her use of question marks and exclamations marks and the inappropriate phrase “Are you kidding me?”.

[2] The student failed to ask his/her professor on time and is now trying to pressure him/her. Also, he/she uses abbreviations and colloquial language (“prof”, “&”, “wanna”), which is also inappropriate in this context.

[3] This student fails to get to the point right away (“Can I take a make-up quiz?”). Instead, he/she shares unnecessary and rather unpleasant details.

[4] Usually, students can find out what the homework is by checking the university’s digital learning platform. Even if the information is not available there, he/she could ask a fellow student. One way or other, this is not a reason to write to a professor. Also, the salutation (“Hi ...”) is rather informal.

TASK 2a Email etiquette.

1. You’re writing to your professor, Dr. Adam Smith. Which email address should you use?

- c) Your university email address (s.miller@dc-uni.edu)
- That way, your professor will know right away that you’re actually a student. Also, email addresses (just like student IDs) can be used to identify students in the system. Last but not least, private email addresses may be rejected by the university’s spam filters.

3. It’s the first time you are writing to a professor. What should you do first?

- a) Say who you are.
- Again, professor do not necessarily know all their students by name; if you haven’t been in touch before, it makes sense to tell your professor your name and other useful information such as the class you’re taking.

5. Which salutation can you use when you do not know the name of the recipient?

- b) Dear Sir or Madam, ...

7. You’re writing an email to Professor Smith’s secretary, Jane Miller (no title). What is the best way to address her?

- c) Dear Ms. Smith, ...
- “Mrs.” is for a married woman, “Miss” for an unmarried woman. “Ms.” is neutral and the standard address.

2. You have a question about a course assignment. What is a good subject line for your email?

- b) “Presentation for Marine Biology 101, Mon. 10:00-12:00”
- Remember that professors often teach a large number of classes and receive lots of emails. You want to make it as easy for your professor as possible to find out who you are and what you’re talking about.

4. What is the best way to label an attachment?

- c) Scott Miller – Presentation Marine Biology 101.pdf
- Please see question 2.

6. You’re writing a message to your professor, Dr. Adam Smith. What are the proper ways to address him? (more than one correct answer)

- c) Dear Dr. Smith, ...
- e) Dear Professor Smith, ...

8. You’ve addressed the recipient of your email (“Dear Bill, ...”) – how do you continue?

- a) with an uppercase letter (“Could you let me know ...”)

9. Which is not a correct way to say that you're sending a file with your email?

- c) I send you my presentation for next Thursday as an attachment.
 - The present progressive should be used to express that you are doing it now, not on a regular basis.

11. Which statement about signatures is true?

- a) You should sign with your first name and last name ("Steve Miller").

10. Which closing line is the most common in professional emails?

- b) Best regards, ... / Best wishes, ...
 - "Yours faithfully" is very formal, "Lots of love" too informal.

12. You're writing to a group of people who don't know each other. What should you do?

- c) Add all participants to the "bcc" box.
 This is done for privacy reasons – the recipients should not be able to see each other's email addresses.

TASK 3	Jessica	Hala	Steve	Felipe	nobody
a) ... is unhappy with his/her test results.				X	
b) ... has talked with the professor about his/her issue before.		X			
c) ... wants to re-take his/her failed midterm.					X
d) ... is sending the professor a file.		X			
e) ... wants to make an appointment with the professor.			x	X	
f) ... apologizes for being late to class.					X
g) ... would rather not cancel an appointment.	x				

TASK 4

<p>FROM: j.stevens@dc-uni.edu TO: prof.michael.weston@dc-uni.edu SUBJECT: Marine Biology 101 – Extension of term paper deadline? Dear Professor Weston,</p> <p>As I told you in my last email, I have a problem with my term paper for Marine Biology 101. My laptop, on which I had saved the draft of the paper and most of my notes, was stolen last week and unfortunately, I do not have a backup. I'm afraid it will take me a couple of days to re-write the paper and I doubt that I will be able to finish it by Monday. Therefore, I wanted to ask if it would be possible to extend the deadline for submission until next Wednesday. Best regards, John Stevens</p>	<p><i>Use university email address!</i></p> <p><i>Or: Dear Dr. Weston; NOT: Mr. Weston, Prof. Weston or Prof. Dr. Weston</i> <i>refer back to original message</i></p> <p><i>Closing line</i> <i>Signature</i></p>
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<p>FROM: j.stevens@dc-uni.edu TO: jenny.smith@dc-uni.edu SUBJECT: Mistake on transcript of records – Student ID 1231231 Dear Ms. Smith,</p> <p>I downloaded my transcript of records yesterday and noticed a mistake on the second page. It says on the transcript that I failed the class "Marine Biology 101", which is not true; I passed the exam on the second attempt and got a B-. I would really appreciate it if you could correct his mistake as soon as possible, as I need the transcript to apply for a scholarship and the deadline is on Friday. Please let me know if there is anything I need to do. Thank you in advance for your help! Best regards, John Stevens</p>	<p><i>use university email address!</i></p> <p><i>give your student ID so the recipient can identify you easily</i> <i>The recipient does not have a title, so please use Ms. (not Mrs. or Miss)</i> <i>Describe the problem</i></p> <p><i>Say what you'd like the recipient to do.</i></p> <p><i>Closing line</i> <i>Signature</i></p>
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FROM: j.stevens@dc-uni.edu
TO: jonathan.parker@dc-uni.edu
SUBJECT: Question about student exchange at the University of Minnesota
- Student ID 1231231

Dear Mr. Parker,

As we discussed in your office hour last week,
I would like to study abroad next year, preferably in the USA. I looked at
the brochures you gave me and I really liked the one about the University
of Minnesota. However, I have some more questions regarding the price
and the application process. In addition, I'd like some more information
about scholarships I could apply for.
Unfortunately, I won't be able to make it to your office hour this week, as I
have an exam on Thursday. Could I also come in on Friday? Thanks in
advance for your answer!
Best regards,
John Stevens

use university email address!

*give your student ID so the recipient can
identify you easily*

*refer back to original message
Describe the problem*

Say what you'd like the recipient to do

*Closing line
Signature*