



Writing emails

Grammar

Indirect questions: In an academic environment, a direct question might seem impolite - especially when addressing your professors, and especially in writing. An indirect question might be more appropriate in these situations. Indirect questions might begin with an extra phrase to make the question sound more polite. Such phrases include: Can you tell me...; Do you think...; I wonder ...

- Can you tell me when the next assignment is due?
- I wonder if you know how I can switch seminar groups.
- Do you think she will be able to come to class next week?
- Excuse me, but could you repeat the instructions?

Exercise: Rewrite the direct questions as indirect questions.

1. When does the course start? Could you tell me
2. Do I need to do a level test? Please let me know
3. How much does the course cost? Would you mind telling me
4. Do you have native-speaking teachers? Could you tell me

Writing

Writing Tip: We tend to use more formal language when **writing in academic context**. The **choice of words, grammar and tone** differs greatly between formal and informal language. In formal situations, they are less personal, and we tend to avoid casual language or colloquialisms. The tone in more formal language is less relaxed sounding and avoids phrasal verbs. The following examples will help you to recognize informal vs. formal ways of giving the same message:

- | | | |
|--|------------|--|
| <i>say sorry for being late</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>apologize or excuse yourself for being late</i> |
| <i>plus or and</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>moreover, additionally</i> |
| <i>but</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>nevertheless, however</i> |
| <i>just wanted to let you know</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>I am writing to inform you...</i> |
| <i>You can call me if you need anything.</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>Please do not hesitate to contact me.</i> |
| <i>give</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>provide</i> |
| <i>get</i> | <i>vs.</i> | <i>obtain / gain</i> |

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EMAILS

Email messages are generally less formal than letters, but there are still certain expectations for appropriate and successful email communication with faculty, colleagues and other professionals.

Complete the text below with adjectives from the list:

personal, descriptive, full, kind, convenient, concise, academic, large, formal, conversational, exaggerated, grateful, lazy, willing

Points to remember

- In academic emails, de-emphasize the **1** _____ aspect.
- Use of polite terms and apologies does not guarantee a polite tone. Be careful not to sound arrogant or bossy.
- Keep messages as **2** _____ as possible: leave out **3** _____ details.
- Do not send **4** _____ attachments unless asked.
- Use your university email account for **5** _____ and professional correspondence.

Names

If you don't know a professor – Professor Jane Doe, for example – address her as “**Professor Doe**” (title + last name) until she writes back with a signature that gives you a clue to how you can address her. If she signs her response to you with “Jane Doe”, you probably need to stay with a more **6** _____ approach and use “Professor.” If she writes back using “Jane,” she can (and should) be addressed in the future as “Jane”.

Formality

We may speak using the words *wanna* and *gonna*, but we don't write them unless we are reporting speech or dialect. We also avoid most abbreviations, emoticons 😊, **7** _____ punctuation, and text messaging short forms (e.g. FYI).

Requests

It is important to be polite when you are asking someone to help you.

Here are some suggested phrases:

- Would you be so **8** _____ as to...
- I hope you might be **9** _____ to...
- When **10** _____ for you, could you please...
- I would be most **11** _____ if you...

Format

- SUBJECT line: concise but **12** _____
- Start with **Dear Prof./Dr./Ms./Mrs./Mr.** Doe,
- End with **Best regards, Regards, Sincerely, Best, Thank you,**
- Use your **13** _____ name in the closing of your *first* message
- Proofread and spell-check (spelling errors are considered **14** _____ and unprofessional) before you hit SEND
- Don't forget to include your **class/group number** or identifying information

Adapted from: http://www4.ncsu.edu/~nmswishe/academic_email.pdf (10 February 2015).

Answer Key - ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL EMAILS

Email messages are generally less formal than letters, but there are still certain expectations for appropriate and successful email communication with faculty, colleagues and other professionals.

Complete the text below with adjectives from the list:

personal, descriptive, full, kind, convenient, concise, academic, large, formal, conversational, exaggerated, grateful, lazy, willing

Critical points to remember

- In academic emails, de-emphasize the **1 personal** aspect.
- Use of polite terms and apologies does not guarantee a polite tone. Be careful not to sound arrogant or bossy.
- Keep messages as **2 concise** as possible: leave out **3 descriptive** details.
- Do not send **4 large** attachments unless asked.
- Use your university email account for **5 academic** and professional correspondence.

Names

If you don't know a professor – Professor Jane Doe, for example – address her as “Professor Doe” (title + last name) until she writes back with a signature that gives you a clue to how you can address her. If she signs her response to you with “Jane Doe”, you probably need to stay with a more **6 formal** approach and use “Professor Doe.” If she writes back using “Jane,” she can (and should) be addressed in the future as “Jane”.

(Unlike in Czech, we **NEVER** say Mrs. Professor or Mrs. Teacher or Mrs. Master!!!!)

Formality

We may speak using the words *wanna* and *gonna*, but we don't write them unless we are reporting speech or dialect. We also usually avoid abbreviations, emoticons 😊, **7 exaggerated** punctuation (e.g.!!!), and text messaging short forms (e.g. **FYI** – for your information).

Requests

It is important to be polite when you are asking someone to help you. Some suggested phrases:

- Would you be so **8 kind** as to...
- I hope you might be **9 willing** to...
- When **10 convenient** for you, could you please...
- I would be most **11 grateful** if you could...

Format

- SUBJECT line: concise but **12 informative**
- Start with [Dear] Prof./Dr./Ms. Doe,
- End with Best regards, Regards, Sincerely, Best, Thank you,
- Use your **13 full** name in the closing of your *first* message
- Proofread and spell-check before you hit SEND (spelling errors are considered **14 lazy** and unprofessional)
- Don't forget to include your class/group number or identifying information

