

How Successful Student Professionals Communicate Electronically

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“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

---George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to assist CSUN COBAE student professionals with communication, specifically communication via email. Face-to-face communication is difficult; electronic communication is *extraordinarily* difficult. An increased awareness of this extreme difficulty is a prerequisite for academic and professional success. Such awareness is *prudent* if the email originates (unsolicited) from a student and *critical* if the student is requesting something (tangible or intangible) from the professor. Naturally, students wish to increase the probability of an email being read and generating a beneficial response. The following sections highlight common problem areas where students can fall short in communicating via email effectively.

Your “From” Name

1. *Make sure your “From” name is formatted correctly.* An email with the “name” of “soccermeister411” or “angie91330” is vague. Your “From” name should be your full first name and full last name. That is, it should be the same name as you would use when submitting a print-based homework assignment in class. This, in general, should be the same name that is maintained on the CSUN SOLAR system.
2. *Similarly, your “From” name is not your email or ISP account.* Your “From” name might be your account name by default on some email systems, however, this default name is not adequate for the purposes of effective communication. Regardless of who provides your email service, you should be able to change the “name” that is sent to the receiver. One method you can use to check your “name” is to send yourself an email message. If you are in doubt, use the CSUN Webmail system to *send* your email message with a correctly formatted name to your professor. The CSUN Webmail system is available to students at no charge and is easy to use (and no, Webmail use is not required to *receive* email).

Your “Subject” Line

3. *Make sure your “Subject” line is unambiguously clear.* For example, a subject line such as “[CSUN Mgt360] – question regarding add procedures” is clearer than “hey! i have question for u” (or similar). If you cannot generate a clear “Subject” line, then simply do not use email--use the telephone or visit with the professor in-person during posted office hours.

The “Body” of your Message

4. *Make sure you start your message with a salutation.* A salutation is a greeting. For example, start every email message with a greeting such as “Professor Smith,” “Dear Mr. Smith,” or “Dear Professor,” even if the email message consists of a single sentence that asks a single question. CSUN students who choose to be business and economics majors understand the twin values of 1), creating good first impressions and 2), developing rich and reliable professional networks.
5. *Use relatively short paragraphs.* Successful email messages typically consist of shorter paragraph lengths than a print-based letter. This typically means no more than three or four sentences per paragraph. Often, the number of sentences per paragraph is less. And don’t be afraid to use a one-sentence paragraph if that sentence is very important.
6. *Use the simplest language possible.* Academics and students can use sophisticated words, but successful student professionals will never substitute glamour for clarity. Your writing should be straightforward and clear. Again, if you are not a good writer, do not use email to communicate with a professor.
7. *Use proper English.* Do not “slack off” with your spelling, grammar, context, content, syntax, or semantics just because this is “...just a little email note...” Communication requires both verbal and non-verbal cues. However, email has no non-verbal (visual, affective, etc.) cues (and smiley faces do not count). You should demonstrate to your professors that you can write well. For student professionals, your COBAE major is, in effect, your first professional job. COBAE majors wish to market themselves well. You want to shine—superb communication is a necessity.
8. *Make sure you end your message with a valediction.* A valediction is a closing word or phrase. For example, end every email message with a valediction such as “Thank You,” “Cordially,” “Respectfully,” or “Regards”; again, even if the email message consists of a single sentence that asks a single question. You want to be courteous and you want results; for professionals, the former engenders the latter.
9. *Always repeat your full first and last names after the valediction.* Even if the “From” name is correct and even if you put your name near the top of the body, the final two words on the page should be your full first name and full last name. And finally, be wary of long signature lines with fancy job titles; for academic purposes, your most important title is likely to be “Student, <course number>, <class number>.”

Before you press the “Send” or “Submit” button

10. *Make sure you re-read your entire email message twice before sending it to the receiver.* Ask yourself—Is the message complete? Did I leave anything out? Are the paragraphs and sentences complete? Or put differently, if I wrote like this for a homework assignment or exam, would I get marked off for poor spelling, grammar or punctuation? And finally, did I ask a question that is better answered by looking something up on a web page somewhere?

And finally...don’t send email with an advertisement in it. If an advertisement is automatically included by your email service, use the free CSUN email service instead.