

# How to write an academic email <sup>1</sup>

## Why is a guide needed?

As a professor or research assistant you may receive dozens of emails each day. Most of these are concise, well-written and relevant. Despite this, we also receive emails which are obscure, rude or impossible to understand. If you wish a fast, efficient (and polite) response then please read on.

## When to write an email

Before you write an email, ask yourself the following:

- Could your problem be solved by checking Moodle, the RWTH homepage or by using a 5min Google search? If so, do that.
- Are you writing to the right person? We are not your study advisors, in charge of RWTHonline or responsible for someone else's courses.
- Are you writing to the right email address? If a functional email address such as [tgno@combi.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:tgno@combi.rwth-aachen.de) or [maheu@combi.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:maheu@combi.rwth-aachen.de) is provided for a course, use this.

Respecting all of those points saves you and us time.

## How to write an email

Make sure to respect the following criteria for any email you write in an academic/professional/formal context:

### (1) Use a concise and direct subject line

The subject line should be simple and reflect the content of your email.

**DO:** Cancellation of MaHeu oral exam date on Monday

**DO:** Termin für BA-Besprechung im Juni

**DO NOT:** Lecture content

**DO NOT:** Prüfung

### (2) Use an appropriate salutation

Start your email with a *Dear* or *Hello*, these are appropriate in formal situations. In German, a polite *Sehr geehrter/sehr geehrte* or a simple *Guten Tag* does the job.

### (3) Address the recipient appropriately (both title and name)

Double-check the spelling of your lecturer or tutor's name and title. Address everyone by their surname first. If they answer with their first name, you may do the same. *Professor* is an occupational title. When addressing a professor, write out their title. This applies to both German and English. Only use the most senior title of the person you are writing to: If someone is a professor, leave away the

<sup>1</sup>This guide was partially based on the guides by [Dr. Mark Lee](#) from the University of Birmingham and the [from the University of Melbourne](#), which address the same topic.

doctorate. M.Sc. or B.Sc. titles are not used in direct address.

**DO:** Dear Professor Büsing  
**DO:** Sehr geehrte Professorin Büsing

**DO NOT:** Hi Cristina  
**DO NOT:** Sehr geehrte Frau Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Büsing

**(5) Keep the body short and straight to the point**

Try to use one paragraph for each idea you want to address. Writing everything in one long paragraph can be confusing for the reader. Tell us what your problem is and how we can help.

**DO:** I am a student from the Optimization B course. Since I just enrolled in my Masters, I automatically got deregistered from the exam.  
As the regular registration period has ended, I can not register myself again. Could you register me for the exam ? My student ID is the 123456.  
I attached my enrolment certificate and a screenshot of the previous registration.  
Thank you for your time!

**DO NOT:** The Moodle videos do not work. I complained about this before but nothing was done. This is horrible. I need to videos. Prof. Schmachtenberg's group had all the videos on Moodle last term and this was way better. Also one of the videos was missing the sound in the middle, so I can not hear what the lecturer is saying.

**(6) End with a clear closing**

It's good practice to sign off at the end of an email with a set phrase such as *Kind regards*, *Best wishes*, followed by your name. In German, use the more polite *Mit freundlichen Grüßen* or the more colloquial *Viele Grüße*. In English, a comma after the salutation is correct, in German, it is not.

**(7) Show restraint when using emoticons**

Use smileys (=D) or emoticons (^ ^) with restraint. Conveying emotions is not the primary purpose of mails to staff. If in doubt, leave it be. Refrain from anything that could be misinterpreted (e.g. :-\*).

**(8) Use your university email**

Please do not write us using your *hotmail*, *web* or *gmail* accounts. Writing from your university account ensures that we know you are who you say you are. This significantly reduces the risk of your mail getting deleted for being another obvious phishing attempt or spam.

**(9) Proofread once more before sending**

Spelling mistakes, erroneous dates, typos or missing commas do get noticed. However, this is probably not what you wish to get noticed for.