

Guidelines for Writing Professional E-mail

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Subject line

- Provide clear, specific subject lines that help the sender identify what he or she must do. For example, if you want to inquire about the SDSU MARC program, try this: "SDSU MARC Program Inquiry – First Last Name".
- Modify the subject line when appropriate; do not continue using the original subject in your reply (or replies) if the subject has changed. Alternately, start a new e-mail if the subject/recipients have changed and/or if the e-mail string is unmanageably long.

Greeting/Salutation

- Use "Dear," title, and last name. For example, use "Dear Dr. Smith," but NOT "Dear Dr. Rhonda Smith," "Dear Rhonda Smith," "Dear Smith," or "Dear Dr. Rhonda." At SDSU, use "Dr." or "Professor" if you are unsure how the person should be addressed.
- If someone signs an e-mail with his or her first name, you have permission to address that person by first name in subsequent e-mails.

Body of E-mail

- Be clear about whether you need something from the recipient. Is this e-mail just to give someone information, or do you need a reply?
- Limit the message to one subject. If you need to raise multiple issues, clearly state this in the first line or in the Subject line. Example (in the body of the e-mail): "Please see below for two questions about our proposal." You may also wish to number a series of questions or issues to make it easier for the recipient to read and respond.
- Keep it short. People may be reading e-mails on mobile devices and may not scroll past the first screen.

Closing

- Include a friendly closing. "Sincerely" may be too formal for a regular business communication, so consider other closings, such as the following: Regards, Best regards, Best wishes, Thanks, and Have a great weekend (if the weekend is coming!)

Miscellaneous suggestions

Read and edit your e-mails before sending them. Spell-check is not always enough. Sometimes, reading them aloud can help you see what you may have forgotten or what is hard to understand.

- Send messages TO the individuals you want to take action; CC those who just need to know what is going on.
- Use "BCC" when you are writing to a large group and don't need all the recipients to see everyone else who received the message.
- Use "reply all" carefully and remove those from the list who don't need to see the reply.
- When naming attachments, be sure the name is professional and meaningful. Re-save a file with a different name, if necessary, for the purposes of e-mailing it.
- Avoid religious comments in both signatures and in the body of the e-mail.
- For urgent matters, respond within 24 hours or apologize for the delay. If you are out of the office or inaccessible, create an "out of office" message.
- Reserve "urgent" (urgent e-mails are marked by an "!" in Microsoft Outlook) for truly urgent or time-sensitive matters. De-select "!" when replying to an urgent request if the situation is no longer urgent.