

# Emailing Professors

November 2020

Emailing is an important skill that every prospective student should have. Good emails can open up opportunities that can pay off greatly down the line. On the other hand, bad emails get ignored or can even give recipients a negative impression of you. Here are some useful [guidelines from the MIT Communication Lab](#):

When creating an email, these three things should be kept in mind:

1. It must be opened – use a strong subject line.
2. It must be concise and easy-to-understand – get to the point and keep it short!
3. It should elicit an appropriate response – include specific questions and options.

## Knowing your audience

Professional emails should have a formal tone to show you value the person's time and understand their position relative to yours. Professors, administrators, and researchers are extremely busy, so you should keep it short and only include necessary information.

## The subject line

The subject line will determine if your reader even opens your email. This should convince the recipient that your message is important. Here are some keys to a strong subject line:

- Include relevant keywords. This makes the point clear and will make the email easier to search for.
- Place keywords first. Cellphones can truncate subject lines, so make sure you open strong.
- Don't be vague. The subject line should act as a summary of your email, so be specific.

Weak subject line	Better subject line
Question about opportunities	PhD Position opportunities in Reyes Lab?
Internship	Summer Internship Application
Questions about research	Prospective Student: Questions about Reyes Lab
Finding time to meet and discuss graduate school opportunities	MSc Applicant Meeting on 10/31?

## The email body

Here are some things you can do to make the body of your email clear and concise.

1. Get to the point quickly. Ideally the main point should be made within the first few lines of text. If you have a list of questions, get to the important ones first.
2. Use short, succinct sentences and eliminate unnecessary details.
3. Emphasize important points when necessary by **bolding** or underlining dates, questions, or key words.
4. Visually separate topics by inserting additional spaces between paragraphs
5. When applicable, make use of numbered lists. This provides the reader a template for their response and helps ensure that all your questions get answered.

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While it's important to be concise, , your email should still include all the information the recipient needs:

- **What should their response include?** Clarify what you need. Do they need to provide any specific information or answer a certain question?
- **When do you need a response?** If the issue is time-sensitive, ensure that you communicate deadlines but also make sure that you provide a reasonable time window for responding.
- **How should they reach out?** You can lay out if and when you are available through email, Zoom, Skype, etc. for any follow-up conversations.

Example:

**Subject: PhD Student Opportunity in Reyes Lab?** **Specific subject line**  
 Dear Dr. Reyes, **Addresses recipient respectfully**

*I'm Jane, a recently graduated student from the University of the Philippines, where I majored in molecular biology. While searching through interesting research areas, I became interested in the Reyes lab's research. I am planning to apply to graduate programs this coming year, and I wanted to know if your lab was looking for PhD students.* **Gets to the point early, Separates paragraphs with extra space**

*I wanted to reach out to gain some insight about the lab and the PhD program. I have a couple of questions:*

- 1. Will the lab have any openings for PhD students next year from the Biomedical Sciences PhD program?*
- 2. I am most interested in your work on viral replication, based on your paper from 2017. Does the lab still actively work on this topic?*
- 3. I would like to know more about life as a graduate student at your lab and at the University of X. Who would be a good person to contact about this?* **Concise, structured questions in order of priority**

*If it would be better to discuss over a video call, I would love to speak over Zoom or Skype. Due to the time difference, I will be most available in the mornings at the PST time zone, but I would be glad to speak whenever is most convenient for you.* **Mentions how recipient can reach out**

*Thank you and I hope to hear from you soon!*  
 Sincerely,  
 Jane dela Cruz  
 janedelacruz@gradmail.com

Following up

Since professors have a busy schedule and receive many emails everyday, your email could go unnoticed. If you don't get a reply within a week, you should follow up with them in a polite manner. Your email can go something like this:

**Re: PhD Student Opportunity in Reyes Lab?**  
 Dear Dr. Reyes,

*I hope you are doing well.*

*I would like to follow up on my last email inquiring about a Ph.D. position. I understand that you are very busy, but I would greatly appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to answer the questions from my previous email.*

*Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon!*  
 Sincerely,  
 Jane dela Cruz  
 janedelacruz@gradmail.com

If you still do not receive a reply, it is likely that the professor is not currently looking for new students or is recruiting through other channels. This is more common than you think, so don't give up!

Further Reading:

- [MIT Communications Lab – Professional emails](#)
- [Cientifico Latino – Emailing prospective supervisors](#)