Email Etiquette
A Guide to Writing a Professional E-mail

E-mail has generally been used as an informal means of communication. However, as it becomes increasingly popular in the job application process, students need to take time to think through the content of the e-mail message that they send to employers.

Although employers don't always read an entire cover letter the first time, they do expect the writer to take time to include the necessary information in an appropriate way. The rules listed below should be used for e-mail when writing or responding to:

- Potential employers
- Co-workers
- Colleagues
- Business members
- College/University staff or personnel

You will be taken seriously, and will often be given more credibility. Common mistakes include:

- Using emoticons ( :o )
- Being too informal
- Misspellings and poor grammar
- No capitalization
- Spelling words the way they sound

Because e-mail has become a mainstream form of communication, students may not easily be able to switch from casual/conversational e-mail to professional e-mail. We have begun to encourage students to practice the use of professional writing, especially after reading an e-mail sent by a student that was full of emoticons and phonetic spellings (e.g., using " ur " for " you're or your;" using " i " for " I "). Professional e-mail is very different from casual e-mail or instant messenger. Below are some rules to consider when writing an e-mail in which you are job prospecting or applying for a job. Remember: it's easier to be ruled out than ruled in for a position.

Rules of the Road

- Always introduce yourself the same way you would in a cover letter.
- Write your e-mail as you would a professional cover or thank-you letter on paper, but be brief.
- In the subject line, make it obvious why you are writing: "Application for XYZ position."
- Make sure you change the contact name and content according to the person/company to whom you are sending the message.
- If you are responding to an e-mail, include the original message in the reply, so the receiver can put your e-mail into the correct context. Also, respond within two business days.
- Always spell words correctly! Don't just use spell check. It won't catch words that are spelled correctly, but are misused within the context of the sentence.
- Never use all capital letters. Employers may think that you are screaming. It is difficult to read.
- Think about the message your e-mail address sends. Keep your address simple, and avoid unprofessional sounding names like "studmuffin" or "partygirl."
- Read your message carefully before you click the send button. The tone of an e-mail can often be misinterpreted. Have someone else proofread your message before you send it. It may be easier to find errors if you print and review your e-mail.
- Scan your resume for viruses before you attach it to your e-mail.
- Name your document "your name, resume." Employers receive hundreds of resumes via e-mail. If you follow-up by asking recruiters if they received your e-mail, they won't have to look through 300 attachments called "resume."
- If you are attaching your resume, ask the receiver if they would prefer that you send it in a different format, i.e.: Word Perfect, rich text format, or as a PDF.
- Do not assume that if an employer is informal that you should be.
- Don't just rely on e-mail. E-mail can be lost. Follow-ups can often be done via the telephone or regular mail.