Email etiquette

'Email etiquette' can be defined as a set of rules for writing emails appropriately. These rules are not fixed and may vary depending on the context and the recipient (i.e. the person receiving the email). An email to a friend about holiday plans for example, will look quite different to an email addressing a tutor about an upcoming assignment. This resource will focus specifically on the University context, and will provide guidance to students on email etiquette when writing to academic staff. Good email etiquette will demonstrate that you are a professional and competent communicator.

Before sending an email to a lecturer or tutor:
- Can you find what you are looking for on the course site or in the course outline? If you can find your answer elsewhere then you can avoid emailing your lecturer or tutor unnecessarily.
- Check the course site and course outline for information on how staff would like you to communicate with them. Email may not be the preferred contact method.
- If email is a suitable way to contact staff, use your UniSA student email. Emails from non-university addresses are often blocked or there is a delay in receiving them.
- For personal or confidential topics, always contact your lecturer or tutor via email. Do not post about these topics in online forums as these can be viewed by everyone in your course.
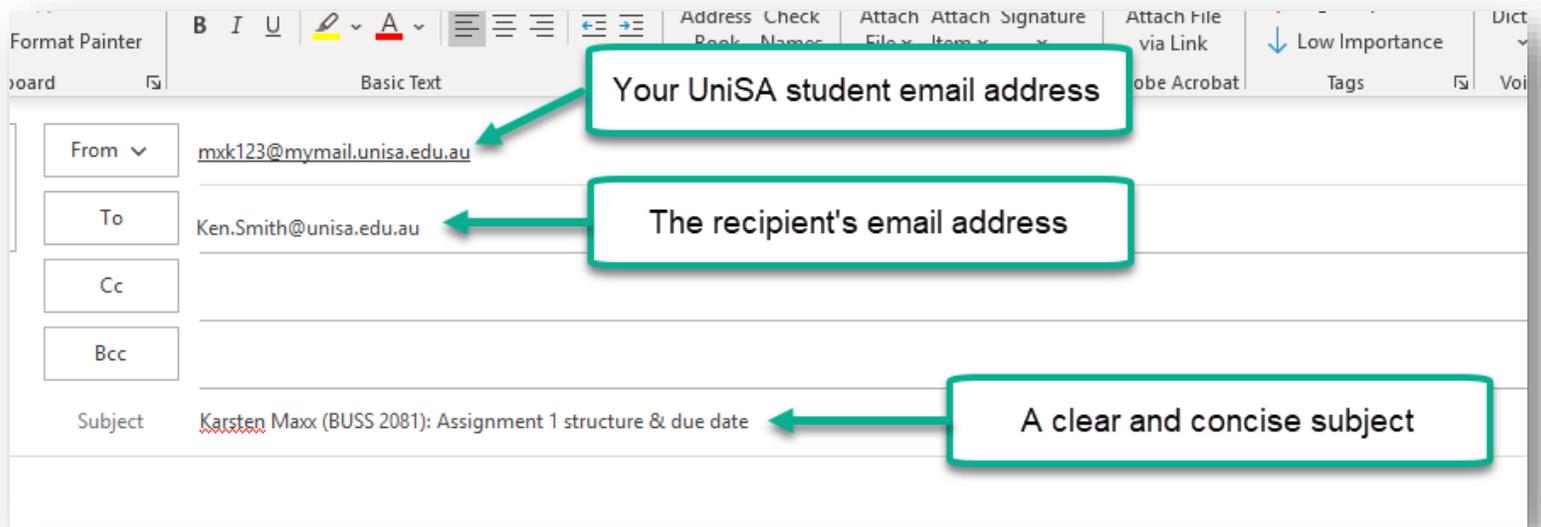
When drafting your emails, consider structure, content, language and tone.
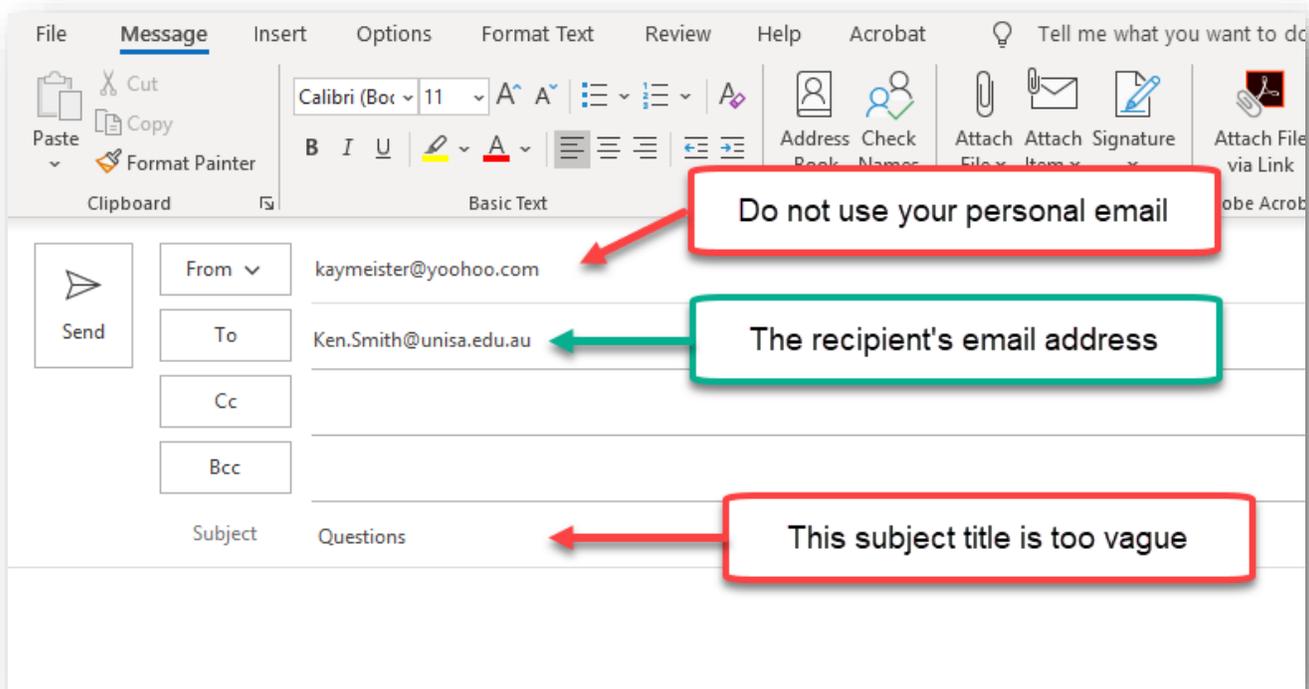
Structure and format

The subject line
- Include a clear, meaningful subject line that lets the recipient know the exact topic even before opening the email.
- Include your full name, your Course code, class (if applicable) and what the email is specifically about.
- Avoid using subject lines which are vague, informal or demanding.

Example of a good subject line

Your UniSA student email address → From ⌄ mxk123@mymail.unisa.edu.au

The recipient's email address → To Ken.Smith@unisa.edu.au

A clear and concise subject → Subject Karsten Maxx (BUSS 2081): Assignment 1 structure & due date

Example of a bad subject line

Do not use your personal email → From ⌄ kaymeister@yoohoo.com

The recipient's email address → To Ken.Smith@unisa.edu.au

This subject title is too vague → Subject Questions

Greeting the recipient
- It is common courtesy to greet the recipient first before launching into the email body.
- If this is the first time you are emailing staff or you are not sure how to address them, use a formal greeting and their official title and family name (e.g. Dear Dr. Smith,).
- If you don't know the staff member's name, look on the course site and/or course outline. If you can't find the name there, check the [Staff directory](#).

Email structure
- Use a writing style which can be easily read by the recipient:
    - Use a standard font style, colour and size (E.g. Arial, Calibri, and Times New Roman in black and in size 10 or 12).
    - Organise the content logically (E.g. in dot points or short paragraphs with spaces between each paragraph).
    - Write in clear, concise and complete sentences.
- Avoid writing long paragraphs and long sentences - it will be too difficult to read and confusing.
- Be clear about the purpose of your email – e.g. briefly explain your situation and then make your request/ask your question.

Email language and tone
- Emails do not have the same cues used in spoken communication (voice, body language, facial expression, etc.) to convey meaning and tone. You will therefore need to be mindful of the words you use and how you use them.
- Always include polite expressions such as 'please' and 'thank you' in your email and try to avoid using explicitly negative language.
- Select words and expressions which are professional, and ensure that you use proper punctuation throughout your email.
- Avoid slang or abbreviations used in messaging (e.g. use 'you' not 'u'; 'please' not 'pls').
- Avoid using the caps lock feature AS IT CAN LOOK LIKE YOU ARE SHOUTING.
- Be cautious when using humour or sarcasm as tone is something that can get misinterpreted in an email - your joke may be taken seriously or seen as offensive.
- Sometimes you may want to email about a complaint or an issue. The staff member may not be able to resolve this immediately, or they may need to refer you to another service. So, use polite language and be respectful in your communication as you would expect others to be with you.
- Never send an email when you feel angry – the tone may reflect your negative mood even if it is unintentional. Give yourself time to cool down and respond appropriately.

Signing off
- Another common courtesy is to sign off at the end.
- Finish with a closing sentence, thanking the staff member for their time.
- Use a formal sign off (e.g. 'Kind Regards', 'Best wishes', 'Many Thanks') followed by your full name and student ID.
- You can create a signature that will always appear at the end of each email. A signature can include your full name, student ID, Degree, Academic Unit and preferred contact details. To learn how to do this for your UniSA student email using Microsoft Outlook, click [here](#).

Example of a good email

Dear Dr. Smith,

I am writing about Assignment 1 for the course BUSS 2081 (Study Period 2). While the instructions are very clear, I would like to get some further clarification about the structure and due date:

- Can I use headings and subheadings to divide my writing into sections?
- What time is the cut off for the assignment? Is it 5pm or later?

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,

Karsten Maxx (ID: 1234567)
Bachelor of Accounting (UniSA Business)
Mobile: 0404 04040

- Uses a formal greeting
- Provides context
- Uses dot points to present the questions
- Closes with a thank you
- Signs off with full name and ID

Example of a bad email

Hey

How do i right that assignment and what time do i have to submit it to u i've got to work on the wkend so I need to no ASAP!!!! Make it snappy hahaha!

- Uses an informal greeting and does not address the recipient
- Provides no context – which assignment and course?
- Uses a font style and colour which is difficult to read
- Uses poor grammar – the run-on sentence makes the message unclear
- Uses SMS style language
- Capitalises words and uses exclamation marks - this makes it look like the sender is shouting
- Includes careless spelling errors
- Uses inappropriate humour which comes across as rude and pushy
- Does not include a sign off, so the recipient does not know who sent the email

Proofread before sending

It is important that you proofread your email before clicking send as even the smallest of errors can suggest carelessness or unprofessionalism.

Check the structure, content and language of your email:
- Is the recipient's email address correct and are you sending it to the right person?
- Is the subject line of your email clear and concise? Does it let the recipient know the exact topic even before they open the email?
- Have you greeted the recipient appropriately and have you spelt their name correctly?
- Have you organised your email into short paragraphs and/or dot points and have you used clear and concise language?
- Have you concluded by thanking the recipient?
- Have you signed off appropriately and included your full name and student ID?
- Is your spelling, punctuation and grammar correct throughout the email?
- Is your tone professional and polite?

Final tips

- Wait until you have finished writing and proofreading your email before adding the recipient's email address. This will ensure that you do not accidentally send the email before it is ready.
- If your lecturer or tutor has emailed you, reply to the email and let them know you have received it.
    - If they have asked questions or given instructions in their email, address these in your response. This will demonstrate that you have read the email, understood the content and will take action.
    - If you have not understood something in the email, ask for clarification.
- Check your UniSA email regularly (at least every 1 – 2 days) so that you do not miss important announcements such as exam notifications, extra guidelines for assignments and/or changes to due dates.
- If you have an alternative email address which you check regularly, set up automatic forwarding of your UniSA emails to that address to ensure that you do not miss any important announcements.

Other useful sources

- Getting online module - Emails
- Creating an email signature
- Ask IT – using student email