Email Netiquette: How to Communicate Effectively with Your Professors

As a college student, you need to make a good impression on your professors in the classroom, when completing homework assignments, presenting class projects and taking exams. Your e-mails also make an impression. Remember, this is not your best friend from high school; it is the person who is posting your final grade at the end of the semester. Consider excellent grammar and sentence structure, appropriate word choice and sensible organization before you hit the send button.

Suggestions for sending an e-mail:

Always use your official WIU email account at zimbra.wiu.edu
- This lets a professor know who sent the email.
- Do not use Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail or your home internet provider email accounts. Emails from unofficial addresses might be ignored or deleted without being read.

Subject Line: Include your first and last name plus course name with days/time
- Identify yourself as a student in your professor's class. e.g. Ima Rowdy – ENG 180 M/W/F 10:00 a.m.
- Instructors who teach 3 to 4 classes also serve on committees and conduct research and may receive many emails every day; let them know who you are.

Greetings/Acknowledgements: Start the e-mail with a sense of respect
- Before beginning the e-mail, review your course syllabus to determine the appropriate title for your professor. If the name on the syllabus is “Pat Jones” and you cannot determine what title to use, use “Professor Jones” to be safe. Also, check to see if the question you are asking is answered in the syllabus.
- No matter how easy-going you perceive your professor to be, never start a message with “Hey teach!”
- A more appropriate start to an e-mail message could be something as simple but meaningful as “Hope your day is going well. I have a question about Monday’s class.”

The Message Itself: Be specific and present it in an organized manner
- Get to the point. If you cannot leave out long stories and scenarios or situations that take paragraphs to explain, you might find it more appropriate to make an appointment to talk to your professor during office hours rather than over e-mail. e.g. “I need to clarify an aspect of the assignment due next week. Do you want the paper double spaced or single spaced?”
- Do not turn in a homework assignment via an actual e-mail message unless the professor indicated that this was an acceptable format. You want your homework to be organized and presented in an easily readable format.

Concluding the Message: End with appreciation
- Examples: “Thank you for your time; I look forward to hearing from you soon.” or “I appreciate you taking the time to consider my request.”
- Do not use slang or IM/texting abbreviations such as LOL, TTYL, “Peace Out!” etc. “Thank you,” is appropriate.

Final Suggestions:
- BEFORE SENDING: Always read the message out loud and run spellcheck.
- AFTER SENDING: Do not expect replies to come instantly, especially after hours or on weekends/holidays.

Adapted from University of Central Florida Student Academic Resource Center, University of South Carolina Aiken Academic Success Center and Metropolitan State University of Denver.