Many Americans complain that, aside from some kind of symbolic middle-class certification, college is a waste, that it doesn’t teach “real-life” skills. But in light of how integral written communication has become to our daily lives, I’d consider learning how to use e-mail in ways that help you, not only to express your thoughts effectively, but also to establish and maintain the goodwill of others — including higher-ranking others, like bosses — to be a pretty crucial real-life skill.

Just as you would, for example, dress for work differently than for play, you should communicate in ways that are appropriate to the social context. (Basically, classes are (semi-)professional settings, and should be treated as such.) This is especially true for written communication because it’s more permanent while at the same time lacking the nuances of face-to-face communication. Also, many older people who didn’t grow up e-mailing/texting/IM-ing are, believe it or not, still alive, and many of them still expect to see more formality in correspondence. I.e., they’re more likely to regard e-mails as letters rather than as texts, IMs, tweets, etc.

So please check out the recommendations below.

(If you need more justification about the importance of all of this, please see www.insidehighered.com/views/2015/04/16/advice-students-so-they-dont-sound-silly-emails-essay)

Basic e-mail etiquette for professional settings

1. **Subject line**: Always include this.
   E.g., [Course]: [The reason for your e-mail in a clear brief phrase].

2. **Salutation**: Always open with a proper greeting that includes the name of the person.*
   In college, it’s safest to use “Professor [Surname]” for your instructors.
   Opening with “Hey ___” is way too casual!

   * Exceptions: These can be omitted in the context of an on-going e-mail exchange.
     Let the higher-status person take the lead on this.

3. **Attachments**: NEVER send an attachment out of the blue without an accompanying explanatory e-mail message — these look like spam and may be treated as such.

4. **Proofread**: Use proper spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Don’t write like you’re texting or IM-ing.

5. **Close**: Always end with an appropriate sign-off. This includes your full name in your initiating e-mail. This is especially important because e-mail addresses often don’t reveal the proper names of their senders.

6. **Appreciation**: You should **always** thank the person for whatever it is that you’re requesting. It’s not only pragmatically beneficial to the requester, but it’s also just good manners.

7. **Other tips** (Included here because they have all happened!):
   • Make sure that your question isn’t already answered in some obvious location, such as in the syllabus or posted announcements.
   • Do not ask to borrow your instructor’s lecture notes because you missed class.
   • Do not ask for extra credit because you did not do as well as hoped/needed on exams, papers, etc. This is especially the case if the instructor already said that none
would be given and/or you haven’t worked particularly hard on the regular material. This is very bad form.

- Do not use “my bad” in e-mails to anyone but your friends. It’s super casual and doesn’t feel as sincere as a simple “I’m sorry.” (Also, who says this anymore?)
- If you’re looking for lengthier responses and/or discussion (e.g., regarding content from lectures and/or readings), try to engage in a face-to-face meeting, in person or remotely (if this is an option), instead of e-mail.
- Leave emotionally charged and complicated matters for face-to-face meetings. Much is lost in written communication as it is. You don’t want to compound that problem by saying things that can be taken badly and/or cannot be easily taken back. So never write e-mails when you’re in the middle of a freak-out!
- There are many more good tips. These are the most important ones, and I’ll take what I can get.
  But if you want more information, see
  http://stu.salemhigh.com/ipadinfo/pdfs/email_etiquette.pdf