

Professional Email Communication

When communicating by email in a professional setting—which includes communications with teachers, professors, potential employers, and mentors—it is important to put your best foot forward. One way to do this is by using the standard email etiquette used across the professional world. In doing so, you will be more likely to ensure that your email is not ignored and present yourself as a mature and competent young person. This is not only important in principle, but also for the purposes of establishing a strong reputation with those that might be able to make important connections for you or recommend you for school admissions and jobs. Award USA encourages all VAP participants to implement the guidance below in their communications with their Award Leader, Assessors, and other adult mentors.

1. Use a professional email address.

You may prefer to be known by a witty handle, but at best, you won't be taken seriously; at worst, your email will land in a spam folder. We recommend either using your official school email address or creating a professional email address with your first and last name.

2. Use a formal salutation.

Professional correspondence should have a certain level of formality, including a standard greeting. Unless you are invited to use a first name, it is best to address your recipient by his or her title, such as "Dear Mr./Ms./Professor_____." If you are unsure of your recipient's gender, you can always address them by their full name, such as "Dear Sam Plantt."

3. Lead with a clear subject line.

A clear and specific subject line will help your reader know exactly what to expect in your email message. If you are writing about a specific class or program, it may help to use the name of the class or program in your subject line. For example, an email about requesting approval for the Skill section of your Award might have the subject line, "Award USA- Requesting Skill Section Approval."

4. Be clear, polite, and succinct.

Before sending an email to a professional contact, review the content and make sure that it is written in complete, coherent sentences; there are no spelling errors; and no part of it is written in all caps or all lower-case letters.

5. Sign off with a 'thank you.'

It is common courtesy to thank someone for his or her time and help. End your email with a "thank you" or "best" and your full name. Your Award USA mentor might be receiving hundreds of emails in one week, so clearly identifying yourself is the easiest way to ensure that you receive a prompt response.

6. Demonstrate patience.

We all like instant gratification, but everyone is busy and sometimes a reply takes more time than that you'd hope. If your question or concern is time sensitive, it may be appropriate to write a follow-up email, but it's important to be realistic about your expectations.

7. Practice common courtesy.

If you expect timely, helpful replies, you should do the same for others. Check your email regularly and respond as soon as you are able.