

To Whom It May Concern

Writing a Professional Email

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Grade Level	8th – 9th Grade	**Time Frame**	80
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	2

Essential Question

Why does professional communication matter?

Summary

A necessary skill for most 21st-century digital citizens is professional email communication. A cordial, professional email is not only a sign of respectful communication, but also clearly relays an intention or request that honors the recipient's time and encourages a desired action, response, or feeling. In this lesson, students compose a cordial, professional email to a teacher.

Snapshot

Engage

In pairs, students engage in a Card Sort where they classify different styles and pieces of an email message.

Explore

Students discuss the differences in professional and unprofessional email communication and look at the elements of a professional email to begin drafting their own.

Explain

Students draft an email message to a teacher.

Extend

Students read their email draft through the eyes of the intended recipient, making edits as necessary. They will compose a reflection of their review.

Evaluate

Students send their email with reflection attached to their teacher.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - English (6-12)

ORG 302: Provide a simple conclusion to a paragraph or essay (e.g., expressing one of the essay's main ideas)

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 9)

9.2.W.1: Students will apply components of a recursive writing process for multiple purposes to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing.
9.4.W.2: Students will select appropriate language to create a specific effect according to purpose in writing.

Attachments

- Card Sort—To Whom It May Concern - Spanish.docx
- Card Sort—To Whom It May Concern - Spanish.pdf
- Card Sort—To Whom It May Concern.docx
- Card Sort—To Whom It May Concern.pdf
- Email Format—To Whom It May Concern - Spanish.pdf
- Email Format—To Whom It May Concern.docx
- Email Format—To Whom It May Concern.pdf
- Email Self Review—To Whom It May Concern - Spanish.docx
- Email Self Review—To Whom It May Concern - Spanish.pdf
- Email Self Review—To Whom It May Concern.docx
- Email Self Review—To Whom It May Concern.pdf
- Lesson Slides- To Whom It May Concern.pptx

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Card Sort cards (attached; one per student pair)
- Email Format handout (attached; one per student)
- Email Self-Review handout (attached; one per student)
- Internet capable devices

20 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Lesson Preparation

Cut out one set of attached **Cart Sort** cards per pair of students prior to the lesson. Pass out a set of mixed-up cards to pairs of students.

The objective for this lesson is to write an organized, focused email that adheres to a professional tone and structure and abides by the writing process.

Using the attached **lesson slides**, begin on **slide 3**. Ask students to do a Card Sort to engage in thinking about the components of an email message. Ask students to select a partner. Give them five minutes to work with the cards and make categories based on how they would classify the text on each.

Once five minutes have passed, tell students to sort the cards based on the following categories:

- Introductory salutation
- Body
- Closing

Sample Student Responses to First Card Sort

Sample student responses might include: "I can tell that words like 'Hey' and 'Dear' would go at the beginning of an email, and 'Thank you and Sincerely' would go at the end." Some of the phrases like "Please hurry" and "Please fix this" might fall into "gray areas" for some students because of their less-than-cordial tone.

After they have made those categories, ask them to share out how they knew to put certain cards in those categories.

Next, display **slide 4** to work with the "gray areas." Ask students to sort the cards again into these categories:

- Professional Communication
- Unprofessional Communication

After students have sorted the cards again into these new categories, ask for feedback about why they made the new classifications. Ask the following questions one at a time:

- Which cards went into which piles?
- Why?
- What is your definition of "professional communication."

Display **slide 5.** Ask students to describe *a professional email.*

Move to **slide 6**. Ask students to describe an *unprofessional email*.

Use **slides 7-8** to introduce the lesson's essential question and learning objectives to students.

Teacher's Note: Reiterating *Professional* and *Unprofessional* Email.

Student responses may include statements like: “A professional email is polite. You use ‘thank you’ instead of ‘thanks’ and ‘Dear’ instead of ‘Hey’. In a professional email, we don’t talk to the person as we would talk to our friends. It’s more formal than casual.”

Tell students that a professional email is clear and concise and has both a respectful and formal tone for the recipient.

Revisit students’ responses to the questions “How would you describe a professional email?” “What about an unprofessional email?”

Pass out the attached **Email Format** handout**.** Read the introduction together. Assign students to write a cordial, professional email to a teacher to accomplish a certain task.

15 minutes

Explore

Ask students, *"What are some reasons you would write an email to a teacher?"* Provide your students some time to respond, then display **slide 9.** Some students will consult the "Tasks to Consider" suggestions on the handout:

- Question about homework
- Idea to share that was not shared in class
- Thanks for help given
- Notification about absence or a problem
- Scheduling time to meet after class

From these examples, ask students to provide specific examples they have experienced where a professional email to a teacher was useful.

Next, ask students, *"When is the best time to send an email?"* Invite them to discuss when they think emails should be sent.

Teacher's Note: Timing an Email

Explain to them that timing is important:

- An email sent to a teacher at 9 pm on a Tuesday night will likely not be returned by 8 am on Wednesday.
- A professional email respects the recipient's time.

The sender should have realistic expectations. Remind students there are always special circumstances (perhaps you only have access to email at a specific time), but an email should be sent close to the time of an issue.

Ask them how long an email to a teacher should be. Instruct them to keep an email short at around four sentences. If it seems like the message needs to be much longer, suggest they have a conversation with the recipient instead.

Display **slide 10.** Direct students' attention to the "Format" section of the handout. Look at the elements of an email together.

- Subject line
- Formal greeting
- Personal context about yourself
- Context about request/sentiment/action
- State request/sentiment/action
- Statement of gratitude
- Formal closing

Teacher's Note: Examples

For each component in **slide 11**, there is a coordinating explanation and example on the second page. As you go through each part of the email, encourage students to take notes and source other examples.

Display **slide 11.** Together, read the example email from “Chris Mears” to their teacher about a quiz grade.

20 minutes

Explain

Using the Email Format handout as a guide, give students time to draft an email to a teacher.

Tell students that when writing an email, it can be very easy to press “Send” on accident before the email draft is ready to go. To avoid this, many people draft their emails in a word processor like Microsoft Word or Google Docs and then paste it into the body of their email. This way, the email can be drafted, proofread, and edited before sending.

Display **slide 12**. Have students open a new document to draft their emails. After determining whom they will write to and about what, they should use the format on the handout as a template.

As students are drafting their emails, display **slide 13,** which includes the elements of an email for them to reference.

20 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 14.** Ask students to read their email draft with the recipient's perspective in mind. Remind students that just because this email draft is short, it is exactly that—a draft—and as such should go through the writing process.

Up until now, students have done their brainstorming and composed a rough draft. Now, ask them to re-read their email draft through the eyes of the recipient.

Pass out the attached **Email Self Review** handout. Instruct students to review their own email messages by looking for the following:

- Tone
- Proofread
- Clarity
- Word choice
- Length
- Time
- Recipient's name

As students read through their drafts, ask them to make notes on the handout of what does not need work and where edits are needed. After reviewing their email drafts, ask students to compose a reflection about the review process. Were any changes necessary? Why or why not? Explain.

After writing out their reflections, students should type the reflection **underneath** their email drafts (after their closing salutation and name).

Teacher's Note: Email Addresses

Let's talk about email addresses! This lesson is an excellent opportunity to discuss having a professional email address. As a student emailing a teacher, it is best for students to use their school-assigned email address. Remind students that email addresses that go beyond basic name information are often distracting (i.e. racecargoof2001@gmail.com).

5 minutes

Evaluate

To have students “turn in” their professional emails, consider posting your school email address for students to send their message to.

Remind students to submit their final emails to you, making sure not to forget the following:

- Subject line
- Reflection after closing salutation and name

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Card sort. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/147
- Pixabay. (n.d.). Greetings in foreign languages. [Image]. https://pixabay.com/illustrations/hello-bonjour-hi-greeting-foreign-1502369/