

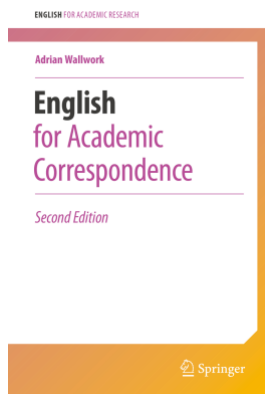
WRITING EMAILS

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WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

This document is primarily intended for students of my PhD English course on Scientific Communication. So some of what is written will only make sense if you have done the course. The course only covers a very small area of writing emails.

For more details on corresponding with editors, reviewers, colleagues and professors:



If you want to do the course contact: adrian.wallwork@gmail.com

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1 HOW TO ADDRESS SOMEONE. DEAR ???

Writing to someone for the FIRST and the SECOND time

The FIRST time you write to someone, for example, to me, you can write:

1. *Dear Adrian Wallwork*
2. *Dear Dr Wallwork* (I don't actually have a PhD, but I won't be offended – nor would other recipients be offended unless they are professors)
3. *Dear Professor Wallwork* (I am not a uni prof, but again I won't be offended)

I would avoid *Dear Mr Wallwork* (see next section) and you should only write *Dear Adrian* if you already know me quite well or you are a similar age (which you are not!)

However, the SECOND time you write to me you should only use either *Dear Dr/Prof Wallwork* or *Dear Adrian* (if you know me well).

NEVER *Dear Adrian Wallwork*

If the person you are writing to is a similar age to you, then in your second email writing *Dear Joe* would be absolutely appropriate.

A good general rule when replying to someone for the first time is to

- address them using exactly the same name (both first and last name) that they use in their signature
- precede this name with an appropriate title
- adopt their style and tone. If you are making the first contact, then it is safer to be formal in order to be sure not to offend anyone. Then as the relationship develops, you can become less (or more) formal as appropriate. In any case, always take into account the reader's customs and culture, remembering that some cultures are much more formal than others.

Spell the recipient's name correctly

Make sure your recipient's name is spelt correctly. Think how you feel when you see your own name is misspelled.

Some names include accents. Look at the other's person's signature and cut and paste it into the beginning of your email—that way you will not make any mistakes either in spelling or in use of accents (e.g., è, ö, ñ).

Although their name may contain an accent, they may have decided to abandon accents in emails—so check to see if they use an accent or not.

Use an appropriate initial salutation and be careful with titles

With Anglos it is generally safe to write any of the following:

Dear Professor Smith,

Your name was given to me by ...

Dear Dr Smith:

I was wondering whether ...

Dear John Smith

I am writing to

Dear John

How are things?

Note that you can follow the person's name by a comma (,), by a colon (:), or with no punctuation at all. Whatever system you adopt, the first word of the next line must begin with a capital letter (Your ..., How ...).

If you have had no communication with the person before, then it is always best to use their title. Also, even if Professor Smith replies to your email and signs himself as John, it is still best to continue using Professor Smith until he says, for instance: *Please feel free to call me John.*

In many other countries people frequently use functional or academic titles instead of names, for example, **Mr Engineer, Mrs Lawyer**. However, many people in academia tend not to use such titles when writing to each other in English.

In the UK the most commonly used salutation, even in professional emails, is Hi. Although Hi used to be considered very informal, this role has now been taken by Hey.

Avoid problems when it is not clear if the recipient is male or female, or which is their surname

It may be difficult to establish someone's gender from their first name. The best solution is always to write both / all names:

Dear Stewart James

Dear Tao Pei Lin

Similarly, avoid Mr, Mrs, Miss, and Ms—they are not frequently used in emails. By not using them you avoid choosing the wrong one.

So, if you are writing to non-academics, be careful how you use the following titles:

Mr—man (not known if married or not)

Ms—woman (not known if married or not)

Mrs—married woman

Miss—unmarried woman

2 EMPATHY AND RESPECT: THINKING FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW NOT YOURS

Email that is like to go in prof's trash

Good morning prof

My name is Pinco Pallino and I am enrolled in the first year of the PhD course in Terrestrial Vehicles and Systems of Transport. Since it is only now that I have made my online enrolment to the course "Scientific English", I am not in the list of students of either the first course or the second course of lessons. I would like to know whether, despite my delay in enrolling, I can still participate in the course: if possible I would like to follow the first session. However, for reasons that unfortunately I cannot change, which are related to my activity as a PhD student, I will not be in Pisa in concomitance with the first lesson of the first session.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Dr Pinco Pallino

PS My girlfriend wants to do an online English course, please could you send me recommendations ... and also for a good English grammar (preferably with Italian explanations).

Empathetic and respectful email

Dear Prof. Wallwork

Am I too late to take part in the first session of your Scientific English course?

Thanks in advance.

Pinco Pallino

Being POLITE and FORMAL does NOT equal being respectful.

- Think **ONLY** about what your reader really needs to know - don't include information that is of interest to **you** but no interest to **him / her**.
- The reader is in a hurry – help them find what they want quickly and easily.
- Write **less and you make fewer mistakes**.

3 LETTER TO EDITOR – SUBMISSION STATUS

Disastrous email to understand status of your submitted paper

Subject line: Paper submission- reply urgently!!

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is XX and I submitted my paper to you several months ago and I am still waiting for your judge.

This is the third email I write to know if my paper was admitted or not. Please answer me in any case.

Best regards

When you write an email, think first about what your desired outcome is. Then only write what will help you achieve that outcome. Always be constructive, positive and helpful.

Subject line: (1) **Manuscript 1453**

Dear (2) **Dear Editor / Dear Dr Helena Smith / Dear Dr Smith**

I was wondering (3) if you had received my email sent *date* (4) **see below**) regarding the submission of my manuscript (1453).

5) Please can you let me know if the review process has begun and when I can expect the reviewers' comments.

Attached is a **6) copy of the paper for your convenience.**

Best regards

7) Minimum number of words

8) Clear layout

Key:

1. Write the subject line from their point of view, not yours. Give specific info.
2. [Find out the editor's name, otherwise write Dear Editor]
3. Use a polite neutral slight indirect expression – NOT a passive/aggressive approach
4. Demonstrate the negative effects indirectly rather than specifically referring to them. In this case you provide the evidence that you have been in contact several times before.
5. State what you want.
6. Be proactive.
7. Using the minimum number of words and clear layout increase the chances of your mail being read.

Key life lesson: If someone doesn't do what they ask you or fails to answer a question in an email or misunderstands you ... this does not mean that by default they are an idiot.

Think of the other person as YOU. If you were the other person, how would you like to be treated.
Not like an idiot I suspect!

4 THE SANDWICH TECHNIQUE: HOW TO CRITICIZE DIPLOMATICALLY

Use a three-part structure:

1. Positive beginning – helps the reader accept the criticisms that you outline in stage 2
2. Constructive criticism
3. Positive ending – reinforces the beginning and is designed to ensure you reader takes action

Your aim is to achieve a goal (in the case we analysed in the lesson, the aim was to produce a good presentation). Your aim is **not** to humiliate the other person.

- You don't know the circumstances of the other person.
- Maybe they didn't have time to reduce the text or the number of slides.
- Maybe they were imagining that you were going to write the concluding slide.

Positive (but honest) beginning

Thanks for your presentation - I really liked some of the images you used, and the background template you have used is great.

Introduce criticisms gently

I just have a couple of things to clarify ...

Have you thought about doing x, y, z?

Take joint responsibility / suggest solutions

One thing we could do is ... / The best solution might be ..

It might be a good idea if we ... / Perhaps we could ...

I have always found it useful to ... If you like, I can try and do the Introduction.

Positive Ending – again, must be sincere

Thanks for all the time you have spent on this - I really appreciate it.

With a few changes here and there, I think we can make a great presentation.

Tips

- Combine the sandwich technique with a list of possible solutions.
- Don't just present a series of criticisms.
- By helping the other person, you are also helping yourself – you both want the same outcome: a great presentation.

Life lesson: You can use the sandwich technique in life in general. Particularly with children, boy/girlfriend and boss.

5 LETTER TO EDITOR / REBUTTAL LETTER = RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS

What does the editor want to read in your letter? What does the editor NOT want to read. Why?

Dear reviewer

I thought the paper was fine in terms of grammar and syntax, but as you noticed there were some mistakes, so I would like to know where they are in order to solve them and improve the paper.

Moreover you noticed that there were some problems in the figure too, would you mind to suggest me some advice to make them clearer?

To conclude I feel the references which you suggested don't fit completely, do you mind to explain why should I include them.

Kind regards,

The above email will only DELAY the publication of your paper. This is because you have asked a series of questions which will not only irritate the editor but which will entail him/her looking for answers – this takes time. And because it takes time, the editor will probably not even bother.

The email below has good content, but is full of English mistakes. If the editor sees these mistakes he/she will automatically think that there are English mistakes in your paper too.

Please find attached the revised version of the paper entitled "XXX" submitted for publication on [Journal name].

The paper has been modified accordingly to Your suggestions, and in particular:

- 1) English has been thoroughly checked by a professional native teacher;
- 2) Figures have been modified, made more concise and better description have been given in the captions; and
- 3) The references you suggested were included in the bibliography, and were used to extend the literature review.

I remain at your disposal for any further correction or comment You might want to suggest,

Example of good email

Please find attached the revised version of our paper entitled xxx (manuscript **No. 547646**).

We found the referees' suggestions **very useful** and have modified the manuscript accordingly.

- The English **has been checked** by a mother tongue professional editor.
- The figures **have been modified**, and made more concise.
- We **have included** the suggested bibliographic references.

We **hope** that you will find the revised manuscript suitable for publication.

Best regards

The example above is good because:

- it makes the editor happy because you have done all that the referees required you to do
- there is a clear indication of which paper yours is (manuscript No.)
- it begins and ends in a positive way (cf sandwich technique)
- the English is correct - note the use of the **present perfect** to describe the changes you have made to the original version

The psychology of dealing with the reviewers

When you receive the rebuttal letter you will not be happy, you will possibly be very angry. This is because what you **THOUGHT** was the perfect paper turns out not to be. How dare they!

Your immediate reaction will be to write a rude email back immediately, stating how incompetent the reviewers are. This is a natural reaction and it is good to experience this reaction. But only experience it. Do not act on it. Instead leave the letter till tomorrow.

The next day re-read it thinking about the reviewers not as incompetent imbeciles but as people who are actually trying to help you improve your paper. And by improving it, remember that more people are likely to read it and understand it.

Analyse the changes that the reviewers want. Do a cost–benefit analysis. I deliberately choose three items – English, figures and biblio – where the cost to you of fulfilling these requirements is low. Your English is likely not to be perfect, so it is probably a good idea to have it checked. Changing the figures and biblio will NOT require much effort on your part – it is not important whether you agree that they need changing.

However, in some cases the cost would be high e.g. if they ask you to repeat an experiment.

It's OK to disagree, but do so constructively.

Show the editor you understand why the reviewer made a particular request / criticism

While we agree with the referee when he says that ... nevertheless ...

Yes, the referee is right in saying that x 0 Y. However

I understand why the referee might want ... However

The rebuttal letter is spectacularly important.

Ensure the English is 100% correct – have it corrected.

Do a cost / benefit analysis. Do what they ask if the cost to you is low.

Don't ask questions.

If you don't do what they ask, say why, but be constructive.

Avoid informal language NO!! Dear Editor, Thanks very much for the reviewer's great suggestions

Avoid emoticons and don't confuse please with being polite

Adopting a friendly tone is NOT necessarily appreciated by your readers

Life lesson

Stop defending your position, start listening, and see the big picture.

Our default position is to defend ourselves and not to listen/read why we might not be as perfect as we think we are.

By default we think that if someone does not understand us then that the other person is an idiot and clear understands nothing.

When angry about something now, we forget that in a short time we will not even remember what we were angry about (i.e. we will NOT remember what the editor asked and what changes we made).

When evaluating someone else's apparently negative request, always do a cost benefit analysis.

6. Seven guidelines for writing an effective emails

1. **Meaningful subject line** - otherwise recipient may not even open your mail.
2. **Never translate typical phrases literally** - learn equivalent phrases.
3. **Write the minimum amount possible** - you will make fewer mistakes.
4. **Always put the most important point in the first line** - otherwise reader may not read it.
5. **Better to be a little too formal than too informal** - you don't want to offend.
6. **Always be polite** - and remember if there is a minimal chance that your reader will misinterpret or be offended then you can be sure he/she will.
7. **Limit your requests and questions** – people will only respond regarding the easiest request or question. So limit yourself to the most important request. You can always send the others in another email.