PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION TIP SHEET

Written Communication

This document will provide general tips for communicating in a professional manner with prospective employers, placement agencies, professors, networking contacts, etc. If you have any questions, or would like additional support, please reach out. We're here to help.

Communicating Professionally in Writing

Professional communication involves all of the different ways you may communicate with others while networking, searching for a job or placement, or in the workplace. Your communication should always be respectful, clear, and show awareness of typical workplace etiquette.

Addressing your written message:

If you are sending a formal letter (e.g. a cover letter), proper format includes the date, full mailing address of the recipient, a formal greeting and a "regarding" (RE:) line summarizing the purpose of your letter.

January 12, 2021

Ms. Mac Marauder
Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Government of Ontario
123 Anywhere Street
Hamilton, ON L8S 1A1

Dear Ms. Marauder,

RE: Job ID #1234 Research and Policy Intern

McMaster University | HUMANITIES

If you are sending an email message, you may begin your message with a formal greeting (e.g. Dear Ms. Marauder). The regarding line should be listed in the "Subject" area when addressing your email message.

For both emails and letters:
- Unless you know the recipient well, always address your message (email, letter, etc.) using a person's title and proper pronouns (e.g. Dr. Smith, Dear Ms. Jones, etc.). If you are unsure about how this person prefers to be addressed, you can view LinkedIn to see if they have a professional profile, or this information may be included on the company's website
- Begin your message with "Dear" or "Good morning" versus casual greetings like "Hi"
- Once you receive a response, you can address your reply by mimicking how they have signed-off in their message response to you (e.g. if they end their email with "Dr. Sam", that is how you would address your reply)

The body of your message:
- Use full sentences and paragraphs
- If your recipient doesn't know you, ensure that you introduce yourself before moving into the reason for your outreach
- Ensure that your message has a professional tone and that your reason for connecting is clear
- Try to keep your message concise and pay attention to length
- Avoid short forms and acronyms (e.g. TTYL, Thx, etc.) and carefully review spelling and grammar

Closing your message:
- When signing off, you can use language like "Sincerely", or "Warm regards"
- Use an appropriate email signature. Information in your signature can include your name, education, and contact information as per the example below:

Sam Smith
Honours B.A. Candidate, French
McMaster University
sam.smith @gmail.com
905-555-5567

Pro Tips:
- Use your McMaster email address for communications within the University community. You can use a personal email address for job applications but ensure that you avoid what can be considered unprofessional (e.g. "ihatework @gmail.com")

- If you are not sure of someone's name, job title, company etc., look them up on LinkedIn or Google prior to reaching out. This can make a big difference in your first impression.
- Be authentic, but respectful of people's time. Keep personal anecdotes to a minimum and simplify your writing wherever possible
- Use an accessible font like Arial or Calibri and a font size of 11pt – 12pt for accessibility

Next Steps:

If you have any questions about professional communications or etiquette, we encourage you to send an email or request an appointment for a one-to-one appointment with your Faculty career support staff.

You can request an appointment by completing our online request form or contact Cristina Foley with any questions.