

# Digital communication: a guide to connecting effectively at university

University life is a whirlwind of lectures, study groups, social events, and everything in between. In today's digital age, much of your communication will happen online, from emails to instant messaging. But how do you ensure your message is received the way you intended? This guide will help you understand how to adapt your communication style for different audiences, ensuring you make a positive impression and build strong connections.

## 1. Understanding your audience

Effective communication starts with understanding who you're talking to. Consider:

- **Relationship:** Are they a friend, classmate, lecturer, or University staff member?
- **Formality:** How formal should your communication be?
- **Purpose:** What's the goal of your message? (e.g., asking a question, scheduling a meeting, sharing information)
- **Context:** Where are you communicating? (e.g., a formal email, a casual group chat)

## 2. Communication styles for different audiences

### Communicating with friends and social groups:

- **Tone:** Casual, friendly, and informal. Use slang, emojis, and abbreviations where appropriate
- **Prose:** Short, concise, and direct. Use group chats and instant messaging for quick updates and casual conversations
- **Examples:**
  - "Hi! Movie night tonight? 8 pm at mine?"
  - "IDK if I'll go tonight 🤔"
- **Platforms:** WhatsApp, Messenger, Discord, social media DMs.

### Communicating with course peers and study groups:

- **Tone:** Collaborative, respectful, and slightly more formal. Avoid excessive slang
- **Prose:** Clear, concise, and focused on the topic at hand. Use proper grammar and spelling
- **Examples:**
  - "Hi everyone, just wanted to share this article I found relevant to our project."
  - "Does anyone understand the solution to question 3 on the assignment?"
- **Platforms:** Group chats, University forums, shared documents (OneDrive).

## Communicating with teaching staff (Academics, Lecturers, Tutors):

- **Tone:** Formal, respectful, and professional. Address them with their appropriate title (Professor, Dr., etc.)
- **Prose:** Clear, concise, and grammatically correct. Use complete sentences and avoid abbreviations or slang
- **Examples:**
  - "Dear Professor Smith, I am writing to request an extension on the upcoming assignment due to..."
  - "Dr. Jones, I have a question regarding the material covered in this week's lecture."
- **Email etiquette:**
  - Use a professional subject line
  - Start with a formal greeting
  - Clearly state your purpose
  - Proofread carefully
  - End with a polite closing (e.g., "Sincerely," "Thank you")
- **Platforms:** Email, Canvas.

## Communicating with university administration and support staff:

- **Tone:** Polite, professional, and respectful
- **Prose:** Clear, concise, and factual. Provide all necessary information
- **Examples:**
  - "Dear Admissions Office, I am writing to inquire about the status of my application."
  - "Dear Student Services, I would like to schedule an appointment with a career advisor."
- **Platforms:** Email, online forms, phone calls (when necessary).

## 3. Navigating digital boundaries and choosing the right platform

### Respecting digital boundaries:

- Be mindful of the time when communicating. Aim for standard working hours (9 am to 5 pm) for formal emails or schedule emails to be sent within these hours
- Avoid late-night or very early messages in group chats
- Always ask if a time is convenient before video calling or schedule video calls in advance
- Ask permission before adding people to group chats
- Use GIFs and emojis sparingly in formal settings
- Be mindful of content shared in group chats as this can be saved and shared by others in the group.

## Choosing the Right Platform:

- **Email:**
  - Use for formal communication with academics and professional staff, for detailed inquiries and official requests. Preferred for detailed academic questions or where it's useful to have a record of the conversation.
- **Canvas:**
  - Use for course-related discussions, assignment submissions, and communication within the course context
  - Avoid sending file attachments via Canvas Inbox as it eats up personal storage space. Instead, send files via email or share with OneDrive links.
- **Instant Messaging (e.g., Teams, Slack, WhatsApp, Messenger):**
  - Use for quick questions, casual group discussions, and study sessions. Use Teams for lecturers only if they permit. Otherwise, use email.
- **Social Media DMs:**
  - For casual conversation with friends. Be very cautious when contacting or accepting messages from anyone you do not know well.

## 4. Key tips for effective digital communication

- **Proofread before sending:** Check for typos, grammatical errors, and clarity
- **Be mindful of your tone:** Be mindful of how your messages might be interpreted and aim for clarity and respect
- **Keep it concise:** Get to the point quickly, avoid unnecessary details, respecting everyone's time
- **Respond promptly:** Acknowledge messages and respond in a timely manner
- **Consider the platform:** Choose the appropriate platform for your message
- **Be professional:** Even in casual settings, maintain a level of professionalism
- **Understand digital boundaries** be aware of when it is or isn't appropriate to contact people
- **Don't write in all caps:** it appears that you are shouting.

## 5. Conclusion:

Mastering digital communication is a crucial skill for success at university and beyond. By understanding your audience and adapting your communication style, you can build strong relationships, communicate effectively, and make the most of your university experience.