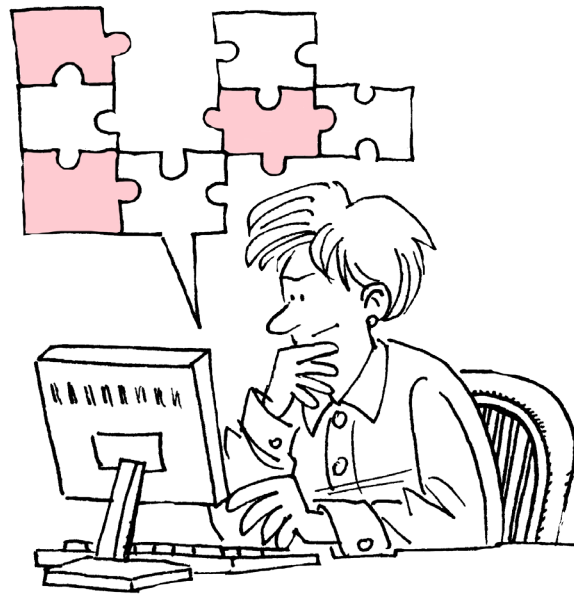


HS COLLEGE-BOUND

Communicating in the Grown-Up World

*What students need to know about communicating
with teachers, professors, and employers*



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HS College-Bound

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

Communicating with adults

THE TOPIC of this session is communication with adults—teachers, professors, coaches, university administrators, employers—in short, the grown-up world.

■ **It's a different playing field—less forgiving.**

Things you got away with as a ten-year-old won't work in this world. Here you're expected to conform to grown-up standards and values:

- Adults don't want their time wasted.
- There's a job that needs to get done, and that's usually their focus.
- They don't want to hear excuses.
- They don't care that you forgot, or that you overslept.

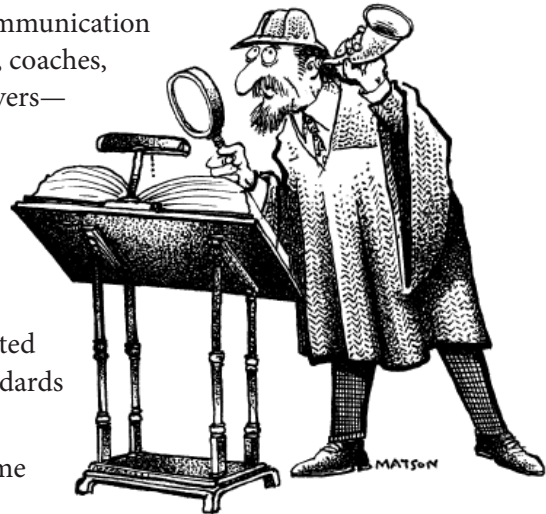
What's more, in the adult world, your failure to meet the standard often carries a penalty. In fact, you may find yourself penalized for not meeting the standard when you didn't even realize there *was* a standard.

In this world, your ignorance is not an excuse.

■ **This session will focus on dealing with one particular type of adult: *teachers*.**

The reason: You may not yet have an employer. You may not deal with a college-admissions officer for another year or two. But right now you *all* have teachers. In addition, as you'll see, eighty percent of what works with teachers will work with other adults.

So let's use *teachers* to take your communication skills to a new level.



PART 1: COMMUNICATING WITH TEACHERS

What teachers want

PUT YOURSELF in the shoes of a teacher—pretend you're *me*.

Here's your situation:

- This semester you're teaching eight different courses; they're evenly divided between writing courses and literature.
- A number of students are taking more than one course with you.
- It's a Wednesday evening, not long after dinner, and you return to your desk to prep for tomorrow's classes.



You open your email, and you see an email from one of your students:

FROM: starfish822@gmail.com
SENT: Wednesday, March 29 7:30 PM
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
CC:
SUBJECT:

Can I get the recording of the last class? There are few points I'd like to here again.

NOTES

WHAT TEACHERS WANT

A closer look

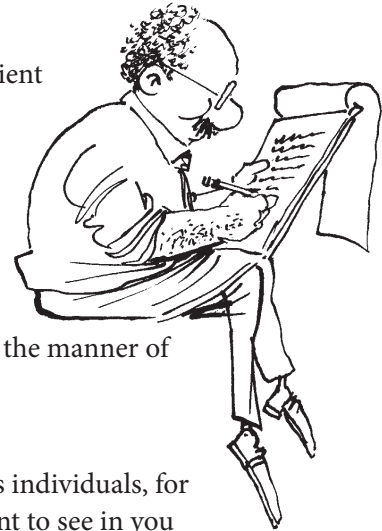
TEACHERS TEND TO BE gentle souls who are patient with their students—even indulgent with them; they're often more willing than other kinds of adults to overlook minor offenses.

But behind any interaction or relationship lie certain desires and expectations — and the more you know about *what teachers want*, the more effective you'll be in both the content and the manner of your communications with them.

So what, exactly, are most teachers looking for?

- **Respect** — In part, teachers want respect as individuals, for themselves. But equally important, they want to see in you respect for the *course*, for the *subject matter*, for the *rules* that guide student conduct in class, and so on.
- **Effort** — Giving it your best effort, really investing in the class. You should know that all teacher, in their brains, have built-in low-effort detectors, and they're continually on the lookout for signs that you're *not really trying*. The converse: Nothing warms a teacher's heart like seeing that you're really doing your best.
- **Engagement** — You may not be in love with math, but when you're in math class, by golly, you'd better *take an interest in it*. The same goes for history, chemistry, and every other subject in the high school curriculum: if you're not automatically interested, *get interested*. That's your job.
- **Gratitude** — Students tend to think of the teacher as *the adult who teaches the class*; in reality that description fits mediocre teachers, the ones who are merely phoning it in. Really good teachers are continually investing time and effort in your learning *outside of the classroom*: they spend hours designing courses, planning & prepping individual sessions, meeting with parents and individual students, and so on. And here's the thing: When your teacher increases her time & effort—her investment in *you*—she doesn't get a pay increase; in most cases, her increased effort brings her no reward, no recognition at all.

As a result, teachers tend to be sensitive about not being appreciated. When you do something that smacks of *ingratitude*, it may be viewed by your teacher as a grave offense.



WHAT TEACHERS WANT

Examples

SITUATION NO. 1

You teach a writing class, and tomorrow your students have a deadline: for the last four days they've been working on a mindmap for a new essay you're calling the "Point A to Point B" essay; their mindmaps are due tomorrow by 6 PM.

So on this evening, the night before the deadline, you receive this message:

FROM: jameswilson08@yahoo.com
SENT: Sunday, February 21 8:30 PM
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
CC:
SUBJECT:

Hi, Mr Speed.

I am a little confused on what a Point A to Point B essay means exactly. I was wondering if you could clarify so I have a full understanding before I start mind mapping.

	YES	NO	N/A (not applicable)
Respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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WHAT TEACHERS WANT

Examples (cont.)**SITUATION NO. 2**

You teach a course called *History & Literature of the Middle Ages*, and for the last several weeks your students have been working on an essay on Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*.

Their first drafts are due this evening by 6 PM; it's now 5 PM, and you receive this message:

FROM: susanmurphy08@yahoo.com
SENT: Monday, February 21 4:58 PM
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
CC:
SUBJECT: Re: MIDDLE AGES: Assignments

Hi, Mr Speed.

Hope you had a nice weekend.

I'm writing because I had an unexpected interruption this afternoon, and I was not able to complete my essay. I'm wondering whether you would like me to send you the partial essay that I have right now, or, if you prefer, I can send you a completed essay later this evening?

I'm so sorry for the inconvenience!!

With gratitude,

Susan Murphy

	YES	NO	N/A (not applicable)
Respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

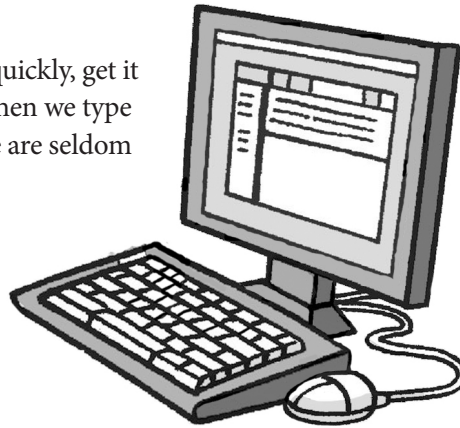
PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Email excellence

Vital ingredients

WHEN WRITING EMAIL, we like to move quickly, get it done and off our plates. But be careful: when we type the first thing that pops into our head, we are seldom effective.

So that's *not* the approach we'll recommend here.



KEYS TO EFFECTIVE EMAIL

The reality is that to write an effective email, you must be —

- smart;
- thoughtful (*mindful*);
- considerate—always meeting the needs of your *reader*.

In addition, the email itself must usually manage well several vital ingredients:

- a strong “SUBJECT:” line;
- a clear logical flow;
- a complete signature.

PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Vital ingredients: A strong “SUBJECT:” line

You can craft “SUBJECT:” lines that meet both your needs and your teacher’s needs. Here’s our suggestion:

■ Use this template:

COURSE TITLE: Your purpose in writing

More than ninety percent of your interactions with a teacher will have the same context: a particular course. So your “SUBJECT:” lines can easily set the scene, establish the context of your message, if you simply begin with *the name of the course* — we recommend formatting it in ALL CAPS (see next point, below).



The remainder of your “SUBJECT:” should convey your *purpose* for writing — your reason for writing, what you seek.

EXAMPLES

SUBJECT: AP BIOLOGY: Requesting an extension

SUBJECT: GEOMETRY: Question about the assignment

SUBJECT: MIDDLE AGES: Trouble viewing the class recording

SUBJECT: HONORS CHEMISTRY: Submitting my presentation

SUBJECT: ESSAY WRITING: Draft 2 of my essay – can we meet?

■ In your “SUBJECT:” lines, use ALL CAPS for the course title.

Bear in mind where your readers first encounter your “SUBJECT:” lines — when scanning the contents of their inbox. So putting the course title in ALL CAPS makes your message easy to spot among the spam and other messages that clutter our inboxes.

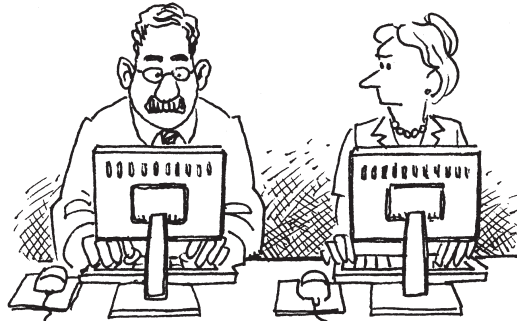
Another benefit: When your teacher alphabetizes his or her inbox by “SUBJECT:”, all the messages on that particular course will be grouped together.

PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Logical flow: Communicating in stages

SOMETIMES, your message will consist of a single sentence — and when you can keep it simple, consider it a blessing.

But what if your message runs longer — three, four sentences, even multiple paragraphs? Is there a simple way to quickly produce a logically organized message?



THE “ORSON” MODEL

Email messages of any length or substance should unfold in three discrete stages. Think of those stages as “ORSON”:

OR — **O**rient the Reader

The preliminary stage of communication, in which you let the reader know *why you’re writing* and *how your information relates to him or her*.

SO — **S**pell Out the details

Going into more detail about the topic of your email—furnishing background information, a simple explanation, a detailed account of what’s been done or achieved, a plan of action, or any of a number of different types of detailed information.

N — **N**ail down (where we go from here)

Tying up any loose ends, letting your reader know what you expect or what you would like to see happen next.

AT A GLANCE

The three phases of ORSON represent distinct stages in any communication. Your paragraphing should clearly reflect these three stages.

NOTES

PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Seeing ORSON in action



ORIGINAL:

FROM: Murphy Brown [murphy.brown@gmail.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: April 30 8:30 AM
SUBJECT: LOGICAL COMM: End-of-the-year questions

Mr. Speed,

It's my understanding that the last meeting of the Logical Communication class will be on Thursday, May 9. Is that correct? And if so, will there be any assignments due after May 9? I'm leaving on May 11 for a family trip to Yellowstone National Park, and I just want to make I have everything finished by then. Also, my mom was wondering what if I don't finalize my essay by the final class—is there any way that you and I could meet to discuss my essay in the final weeks of May, or even the first week of June? Thank you!

Murphy Brown

REVISION—WITH ORSON:

FROM: Murphy Brown [murphy.brown@gmail.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: April 30 8:30 AM
SUBJECT: LOGICAL COMM: End-of-the-year questions

Mr. Speed:

Just a note to ask a few questions about our schedule here at the end of the year. **[Orient]**

Here are my questions:

- It's my understanding that the last meeting of the Logical Communication class will be on Thursday, May 9; is that correct?
- Will there be any assignments due after the final day of class? — I'm asking because we're leaving on May 11 for a family trip to Yellowstone National Park; I want to make sure I have everything finished by then.
- My mom was wondering, in case I don't finalize my essay by our final class, whether there's any way you and I could meet to discuss my essay in the final weeks of May, or even the first week of June? **[Spell Out]**

Thanks in advance, and look forward to hearing from you! **[Nail down]**

Murphy Brown

PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

ORSON in everyday messages

EXAMPLE NO. 1:

FROM: Zoe Alexander [zoe.alex08@gmail.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: March 28 8:39 AM
SUBJECT: ESSAY WRITING: My Draft 2

 ZOE ALEXANDER - Second Thoughts About Going Vegan - DRAFT 2.docx

Hello, Mr. Speed!

I'm writing to ask whether we could set up a meeting to go over my second draft.

I've thoroughly edited it, but now there's something about it that makes it feel clunky to me. I've attached this latest version (Draft 2) for your review, and I'd love to know 1) if you see what I see, and 2) if there's anything I can do to fix it.

As for meeting times: I'm available either Thursday or Friday evening at 7 pm EST; either of those times work for you?

Thank you so much, Mr. Speed!

Zoe Alexander

EXAMPLE NO. 2:

FROM: Holden Caulfield [HCaulfield@yahoo.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: April 21 1:00 PM
SUBJECT: NOVELS BY WOMEN: Today's class

Mr. Speed:

Just a quick note about my participation in today's 1:30 class —

The good news: I was able to make it back from the DMV in time for our class. The bad news: In today's class I may not be able to contribute as much as I'd like to, and I apologize.

Between baseball practice and my other courses, it's been hard for me to keep up with the reading for *Novels by Women*. — Not an excuse; the assignments are all on the syllabus, and I realize that if I'd just managed my time better, I could have gotten the reading done.

What I propose: I've already been able to read up to page 50, and by Friday's class I'll be caught up and will participate fully in our discussion.

I appreciate your patience with me.

Holden Caulfield

NOTES

PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Special situations

FROM: Holly Golightly [HollyGolightly@yahoo.com]
TO: Mrs. Speed [dspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: April 19 6:10 PM
SUBJECT: Letter of recommendation

My mom figured it would be a good idea for me to ask you for a letter of recommendation for each of the biology and chemistry classes I had with you.

Thank you,
 Holly

	YES	NO	N/A (not applicable)
Respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

FROM: Derek Moore [DerekMoore09@gmail.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: April 19 6:10 PM
SUBJECT: Letter of recommendation

Dear Mr. Speed,

I hope you are well. I'm writing because I'm nearing the deadlines for college and conservatory applications, and I'm wondering whether you would be willing to write for me an academic letter of recommendation.

I'm reaching out to you specifically, because three of the universities I'm applying to request non-music recommendations—Indiana University, Lynn Conservatory, and New England Conservatory. Indiana and Lynn use the Common App; NEC uses its own system and gives this guideline for the recommendation: “a non-music teacher addressing your writing and cognitive abilities.” You have been my writing teacher, so I thought of you.

If you feel able and willing to write such a letter for me, just let me know; the Common App and NEC would contact you directly.

At the same time, if you must decline my request, Mr. Speed, I nonetheless thank you for your consideration, and wish you all the best.

Derek Moore

	YES	NO	N/A (not applicable)
Respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gratitude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PART 2: WRITING EFFECTIVE EMAIL

Special situations (*cont.*)

A DIFFERENT APPROACH:

FROM: Jim Morrison [JMorrison@revolvingdoors.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: April 5 11:15 AM
SUBJECT: Letter of recommendation

Hi Mr. Speed,

I'm messaging you to ask if you would do me the favor of writing a letter of recommendation for my Common Application profile.

As a homeschooler who, over the course of many years, has taken online classes from dozens of teachers, I can say that it's been rare to have the option of sticking with a teacher for more than a year. I've now had you as my teacher for four consecutive years.

What's more, I think you've made me relish deep learning, Mr. Speed. So your observations would really be valued.

Sincerely,

Jim Morrison

—AND YET ANOTHER:

FROM: Alfred Butler [AButler@gotham.com]
TO: Roy Speed [rspeed@salientcomm.com]
DATE: May 2 9:10 AM
SUBJECT: Letter of recommendation

Hello, Mr. Speed!

I'm excited for class tomorrow! The courses I've taken with you have been the best English courses I've ever had, and I fully blame you for my love of writing.

Now that I've buttered you up: College apps are coming around, and I'm emailing you because I was wondering if you could write me a letter of recommendation.

I'm happy to provide you with my resumé, personal statement essay, or anything else that might assist you in the effort—whatever would help.

If you're willing, please let me know, and I'll submit your email to the Common App; they will send you instructions on submitting your letter.

Thank you so much for your time, Mr. Speed!

Regards,

Alfred Butler

NOTES

COMMUNICATING WITH ADULTS—PARTING SHOTS

Owning your mistakes

IT'S PROBABLY INEVITABLE that at some point you're going to screw up something major. One of the things you should be prepared for is the way most adults expect you to handle it.

There's a set of communication behaviors unfamiliar to many adolescents but that many adults, at some point in their careers,

have had to embrace—because when you've screwed up, these behaviors may be the key to bringing some kind of resolution and limiting the damage.

Here are the behaviors:

- **Admission of error.** You simply own up to whatever you did: *I screwed this up. This was entirely my own doing...*
- **Empathy.** The idea here is to express to the people hurt by your blunder that you see the damage you've caused and sympathize with their feelings: *This is just awful... I completely understand your being angry with me... I know you're upset; I would feel the same way...*
- **Apology.** You express how sorry you are, even ask forgiveness: *I'm so sorry. I can't apologize enough... I hope that at some point you can forgive me... I so regret what I've done... Please forgive my blunder ...*

It's nearly impossible for a child to experience this level of responsibility. But now that you're entering the adult world, you should know about this — that at some point you may find yourself in a horrible predicament, one in which you must embrace these communication behaviors. In resolving and healing the damage you've done, they will be your allies.

