



Correspondence Bites

Introduction

Why writing an email is more than simply knowing English.

Writing an email isn't just about knowing English.

It's about knowing **what to say, how to organize your message, what information to include, and what tone to use.**

Greetings

- Why greetings matter

The first line of your email immediately tells the reader:

- how formal you are
- how well you know them
- whether your email sounds natural

Choosing the wrong greeting can make an email sound too cold, too informal, or simply unusual.



- The greetings

Hi

Friendly.

The most common greeting today.

Use:

- coworkers
- classmates
- people you already know
- many professors (after you've established contact)

Example:

Hi Sarah,

Hello

Neutral.

A safe choice when you don't know someone's preferred level of formality.

Example:

Hello Mr. Johnson,

Dear

Formal or respectful.

Still standard for:

- professors
- employers
- business emails



- government offices
- customer service

Example:

Dear Professor McKinney,

Hey

Very informal.

Use only with:

- friends
- family
- close coworkers

Never begin a professional email with "Hey" unless you already have a very informal relationship.

Good morning / Good afternoon / Good evening

Polite and professional.

Often used:

- when replying
- when writing to someone for the first time
- in business correspondence

Example:

Good morning, Dr. Smith,



- Common mistakes

This deserves its own section rather than being just one bullet.

Examples:

X Do NOT write - Dear John,

(when emailing your professor)

V Instead try - Dear Professor Smith,

X Do NOT write - Hey Professor!

V Instead try - Hello Professor Smith,

X Do NOT write - Hi Sir

V Instead try Dear Mr. Brown

or

V Another option is - Hello Mr. Brown

X Do Not write - Dear Friend

(very common among ESL learners)

Instead:

- Hello,
- Hi Anna,
- Dear Ms. Brown,

- Commas matter

Correct:

Hi John,

Dear Professor Smith,



Incorrect:

Hi John

Dear Professor Smith

That missing comma is one of the most common learner mistakes.

- When to use each greeting

It's more learner-centered and flows naturally.

***Dear**

Despite what many learners think, Dear does not express affection in English emails.

It is simply the traditional formal opening for letters and emails.

Many languages translate it as beloved, darling, or dear one, which makes learners avoid it. In English, however, it is simply a polite greeting.

Degree of formality

★★★★★ Very formal

Appropriate for

- professors
- employers
- job applications
- business correspondence
- government offices
- people you don't know well
- customer service



Examples

Dear Professor Brown,

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Dear Hiring Manager,

Common mistakes

- Thinking Dear sounds romantic.

- Writing only

Dear John,

to a professor.

Instead try:

Dear Professor Smith,

*Hello

Hello is polite, neutral and professional.

It does not sound distant, but it is less formal than Dear.

Degree of formality

★★★★☆

Appropriate for

- coworkers
- colleagues
- people you have already communicated with
- clients
- professional contacts



Examples

Hello Ms. Wilson,

Hello John,

Common mistakes

Using **Hello** without a name when you know the person's name.

*Hi

Hi is friendly and informal.

It is the greeting people use most often with friends and acquaintances.

Degree of formality

★★☆☆☆

Appropriate for

- friends
- classmates
- coworkers you know well
- people you've developed an informal relationship with

Avoid using it

- in first emails to professors
- job applications
- government agencies
- formal business correspondence



Common mistakes

Beginning every email with **Hi**, regardless of who the recipient is.

***Hey**

Hey is extremely informal.

It sounds conversational rather than professional.

Degree of formality

★☆☆☆☆

Appropriate for

- close friends
- family
- texting

Avoid using it

Almost all professional correspondence.

***Good morning / Good afternoon / Good evening**

These greetings acknowledge the time of day.

They sound polite, warm and professional.

Degree of formality

★★★★☆



Appropriate for

- business emails
- professors
- clients
- first contacts
- replies during the day

Examples

Good morning, Professor Lee,

Good afternoon, Ms. Carter,

Common mistakes

Writing

Good morning!

without addressing anyone in an email.

Keep in mind

English-speaking cultures generally value **politeness without excessive ceremony**.

Your greeting should sound respectful, but it should also sound natural.

Many learners make one of two mistakes:

- They become **too informal** by translating directly from their first language.
- They become **too formal** by writing expressions that native speakers almost never use, such as Most Honorable Professor or Respected Sir.

The goal is not to sound impressive.

The goal is to sound natural.

