

Mentor

COMMUNITY

# Communicating with Instructors

Savvy Strategies to Help you Succeed

WALDEN UNIVERSITY  
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## Introduction

As a Walden University student, you will almost certainly have questions for your instructor. While you may feel apprehensive about reaching out, know that there is no reason to feel anxious when communicating with instructors. To help you feel more confident and comfortable reaching out, this presentation encourages you to get to know your instructor and to take advantage of opportunities to reach out. It also offers strategies for communicating in a thorough, considerate, and proactive manner.

# GET TO KNOW YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Reaching out to anyone—especially an instructor—can be intimidating. But remember that your instructor is here to help, and he/she wants to hear from you. In fact, it's likely that he/she chose their profession *because* they enjoy working with students and want to help them succeed.

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## Why I Became a Teacher: Quotes from Walden Instructors

- “I like working with students.”
- “I’m kind of a nerd and like having academic discussions.”
- “I wanted to make a difference in students’ lives.”

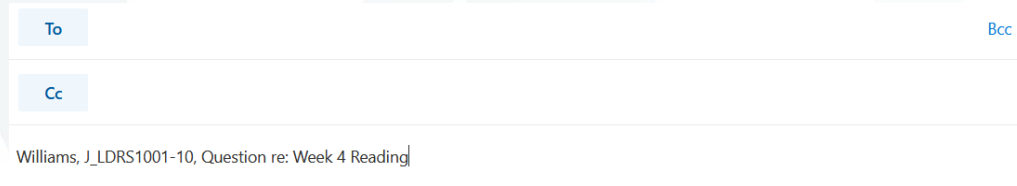


# CONTACTING YOUR INSTRUCTOR

The most common mode of communication between instructors and students is email. Below are a couple of quick reminders about using email to contact your instructor:

## Quick Tips

- Use your Walden student email address to contact your instructor
- Include a specific subject line in your email\*



The image shows a screenshot of an email header. It includes fields for 'To', 'Cc', and 'Bcc'. The subject line is 'Williams, J\_LDRS1001-10, Question re: Week 4 Reading'. A blue arrow points to the subject line.

\* Check the **Course Policies** section of your syllabus to see if your instructor has provided specific instructions for formatting subject lines.

**Note:** Check out ["How do I access myWalden email?"](#) for help locating and accessing your Walden email account.



# OPPORTUNITIES TO REACH OUT

Successful online students regularly communicate with their instructors. Here are just a few reasons you may need to reach out to your instructor this term:

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## Examples


- To clarify grading criteria and expectations
- To remedy a mistake you've made
- To alert your instructor to a personal issue or complication
- To clarify assignment feedback
- To ask for more details around instructions or rubrics
- To gain a better understanding of textbook terminology or course content



**Note:** Check out ["How do I contact my instructor?"](#) for help locating your instructor's contact info and for information regarding instructor response times.

# BE SPECIFIC & THOROUGH


When reaching out to an instructor, be sure to **ask a specific question**. Demonstrate what you DO understand, as well as what you DON'T understand. Specific and thorough questions enable your instructor to provide a quick and direct answer—without the back-and-forth.



I don't understand the reading for this week.

The student does not ask a specific question. It would be difficult for the instructor to respond to this inquiry without getting some additional information from the student.

If I am understanding correctly, in “Chapter 1: An Introduction to Self-Leadership,” self-leadership refers to the drive that helps you accomplish your goals. Can you tell me if I’m on the right track? If not, can you explain what I am missing?



The student asks a focused question and explains his/her understanding of the assigned reading. The instructor would easily be able to respond to the student's request for clarification.

# BE CONSIDERATE

Instructors want to hear from you. However, remember that—just like you—they have busy schedules and many responsibilities. When reaching out, be considerate of their time and use a professional tone.

## Example

Dear Professor Smith,

My name is Joe Williams, and I'm a student in your LDRS1001-10 class. As I was reviewing the reading "Superman and Me," I was confused by the line, "I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words." I understand that this realization shapes the author's view of the world, but I can't seem to grasp the comparison he draws between fences and paragraphs. Would you be able to clarify this idea for me? Thanks in advance for your guidance! I look forward to hearing back.

Best,

Joe Williams

Open with a professional greeting. Be sure to identify yourself.

Close with a thank you and your signature.

Provide a brief but clear description of your email's purpose.

**Note: While most instructors respond quickly, be patient when waiting for an answer and only send a follow-up after allowing the instructor at least 48 hours to respond.**

# BE PROACTIVE

If you have questions about an assignment, ask them well ahead of the deadline. This ensures that your instructor has ample time to provide clarification and support and that you have ample time to apply their feedback to your assignment.



- At the start of each week, look ahead to upcoming assignments and due dates.
- Use a planner to map out your week. Include all work, school, and personal responsibilities. While planning out your week, think ahead: will weather, a professional responsibility, or family obligation impact your schoolwork? If so, let your instructor know.
- When creating a study plan for the week, allow 1-2 days to ask questions and to get answers to those questions.
- Prior to submitting your work, be sure to double-check that you have met the criteria outlined in the rubric for the assignment. If you have any concerns or confusion regarding the rubric, reach out to your instructor, or check out this helpful [guide to understanding rubrics](#).



# BE PROACTIVE

Being proactive means anticipating potential challenges and alerting your instructor to those challenges *before* they arise. Acting proactively means brainstorming preventative solutions, rather than reacting to a problem after the fact. This, in turn, prevents a small hitch from becoming a major problem.

## Example

Dear Professor Smith,

My name is Joe Williams, and I'm a student in your LDRS1001-10 class. I just learned that my area will likely experience severe thunderstorms and power outages over the next 48 hours. I am still working on the assignment that is due on Thursday. My plan is to turn in the assignment on Thursday morning, but, depending on the weather, I may not be able to. If necessary, is it okay if I submit the work on Friday or Saturday? Thanks in advance for your guidance!

Best,

Joe Williams

Reach out as soon as you anticipate a potential challenge.

If possible, offer a potential solution to the problem.



## Closing

Before reaching out to your instructor, take some time to prepare:

- What are you hoping to gain or learn by reaching out?
- In order to apply the advice you receive, how soon do you need to reach out?
- What do you already know about the question you are asking? What don't you know?

Instructors welcome questions, but they are better able to help when you communicate thoughtfully, thoroughly, and proactively.

For more tips, check out these [5 Essential Tips for Email Etiquette!](#)

Questions? Email us at  
[academicskills@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:academicskills@mail.waldenu.edu)