

Academic etiquette and general rules at the University

Academia has its own customs and traditions that can be confusing for students. Even simple things like addressing your professor may not seem evident. The academic etiquette refers to a set of rules and norms related to classes and being a student at a university. Following these rules can improve not only the general atmosphere in your interactions with academics and peers but also your grades. Listed below are common rules of the academic etiquette.

1. Be formal

Academics may not be as chilled out as you think (or as they seem to be), which is why it is always better to keep a proper distance and use titles of respect. Be polite and formal both in personal contacts and in e-mails.

How to address the academic teachers

- **“Professor + Last Name”** for academics who hold the title “Prof. dr hab.” or “Dr hab.”,
- **“Doctor + Last Name”** for academics who have earned a doctoral degree (PhD, Dr). When in doubt, “Dr. Last Name” is the safest way to address an academic you do not know anything about. It is generally the standard form of addressing instructors who do not hold the rank of professor such as lecturers, readers, senior lecturers, and research associates.

Try to avoid gendered addresses like ‘Mr.’ or ‘Mrs.’ Calling a professor or someone with a doctorate “Mr.” or “Mrs.” can be disrespectful as it does not acknowledge the years of work they have done to earn the title of “Dr.” or “Professor”.

Some professors allow their students to call them by their first names, while others find it rude and presumptuous. For this reason, never call your instructors by their first name unless they explicitly tell you that you can. This includes graduate student instructors as well.

- If you know the function of a person at the Faculty/University, you may use e.g. **„Dean + Last Name”, “Director + Last Name”** for academics in relevant functions.

Politeness in e-mails and letters

Your academic teachers are happy to hear from you if you need any help and advice or to communicate something. It is important that when writing an email to an academic, you use the correct salutation, introduce yourself, communicate your message clearly, and close the email politely. Always read through your email before you click the ‘Send’ button. Have you included an appropriate salutation, title, and sign off? Is your spelling and grammar correct? This will save you from any embarrassing typos, ensuring your email is easy for the recipient to understand.

(1) Use a concise and direct subject line

The subject line should be simple and reflect the content of your email. Something like “Question about test result” or “Meeting request” is clear and appropriate. If the subject indicates the time, then the precise time designation must be used, e.g. "deadline – 20.05.2023"; do not use the terms "today", "tomorrow", "in a week".

(2) Use an appropriate salutation

Always start an email with an appropriate and respectful salutation. Start your email with a “Dear Prof. / Dr.”, which is appropriate in formal situations. Do not begin your letter with ‘Hey’, ‘Hi’, ‘Hello’ - it is not OK when you contact your teacher, you may use it when you are emailing friends.

(3) Introduce yourself

Tell your lecturer who you are, especially if this is the first email you are writing to him/her.

(4) Keep the body short and straight to the point

Be specific, clear, concise, and formal. Explain your situation in no more than a couple of sentences and suggest how the recipient can help you to address the problem. Try to use one paragraph for each idea you want to address. Writing everything in one long paragraph can be confusing to the reader. Exclude slang terms and emojis, be polite, and avoid making demands.

(5) End with a clear closing

It is good practice to sign off at the end of an email with a set phrase such as ‘Kind regards’, ‘Best regards’, ‘Best wishes’, ‘Yours sincerely’, ‘Respectfully’, ‘Yours faithfully’, or ‘Thanks’, followed by your name.

Example

Below is a template you can follow and adjust when you want to email a lecturer, tutor, or course coordinator. Each element is numbered and explained further underneath.

(1) Subject: *Request for a meeting*

(2) *Dear Doctor Smith/Dear Professor Nowak/Dear Dean,*

(3) *I am a first-year student of the Medical Biology on your Ecology course,*

(4) *I have a question regarding the lecture delivered last week which I could not attend due to being ill. I got some notes from my colleagues; however, some issues are not clear to me. Could I have an appointment with you to clarify some things? I look forward to hearing from you.*

(5) *Kind regards,*

[Your name]

Another important advice – always answer an email from your academic teacher or at least confirm reading it.

2. Attend classes

The quickest way to an academic disaster is to do the opposite. Each lecturer has their own attendance policy that will be presented to the students during the first meeting. Absences from classes are a ground for failing the course. If you cannot attend a class, please inform the teacher about it in advance (e.g. by email), and if it is not possible, justify your absence as soon as possible (the latest during the next meeting). Always ask what you can do to make up for the missing material.

3. Be on time

- **You have to come to a lecture/lab/etc. on time.** In Polish culture, we allow the “academic quarter” – which means, that if you are late up to 15 minutes, you can still enter. If you exceed this limit, you may not be allowed to participate in the class. Always apologize for being late, and if you are considerably late, it is better to approach the teacher after the class and apologize personally – it is a nice gesture. Your personal apology will be a sign of respect – and that will be noticed.
- **Do not collect your belongings until the lecturer has finished the lecture/class.** If it is absolutely necessary to leave the class before it ends, it is a good idea to inform your teacher about it before the beginning of the class if possible; if not, quietly, without disturbing the others, collect your belongings and say goodbye to the lecturer.
- **Absence of the lecturer.** If the lecturer is late, it is necessary to wait until the lecturer or an official from the faculty administration arrives and announces that the lecture is cancelled. If a lecturer does not arrive within 15 minutes, the course/group leader should clarify the situation at the dean's office.

4. Be honest and sincere

Students are expected to be honest and ethical at all times in their pursuit of academic goals. Class members who participate in any violation of academic integrity will be subject to disciplinary action.

- Plagiarism is a serious violation and one that professors take to heart. Some professors use software and other aids to spot plagiarized material.
- Violations include (but are not limited to) cheating on exams or assignments by taking out your mobile phone, looking at someone else's work, talking during the tests or exams, informing others of the exam questions, submitting work of another person without giving due credit to that person, and using study aids that are not authorized by the professor.

5. Dress code for exams

Even though it is okay to wear jeans and t-shirts while attending regular classes, you should wear more formal clothes for an exam. The appropriate outfit for a man would be a shirt and a jacket (along with long trousers of course), whereas a woman can wear a knee-long skirt and a shirt (long sleeves in the winter and short sleeves in the summer) or a dress – but without a cleavage, with covered shoulders, and of a suitable length (again, knee-long.) Remember that the first impression is particularly important at oral exams!

6. Some general tips for students

- **Do not complain, sleep, play on your phone, do work for other classes.** Private conversations with your neighbour and mobile phones ringing in class are two of the biggest pet peeves of professors. Most professors do not mind if you whisper a question to your neighbour to confirm something that is being discussed in class, but more than that is distracting. Your classmates deserve your respect and support.
- **Take notes during lectures**
- **Rise your hand if you have something to say**
- **Make an appointment with the instructor.** If you want to talk about classes, supplement your knowledge, or discuss a test, do not stop the instructor in the hallway but make an appointment with him or come to his office during consultation hours displayed on the door or on the UMCS website.
- **Email to biologia@umcs.pl to get information about:**
 - the bank account number (each student has his/her own account number),
 - the amount of the semester fee
 - issuance of a certificate of completion of the semester (such a certificate is needed to extend the visa validity)
 - collection of the student ID card.
- **Send an email to your supervisor when you have other concerns or questions.**

Rules prepared based on:

<https://erasmuspoland.pl/2020/03/10/savoir-vivre-at-polish-university/>

<https://www.uww.edu/documents/aaec/academic-success/Academic-Etiquette.pdf>

<https://students.unimelb.edu.au/academic-skills/explore-our-resources/developing-an-academic-writing-style/email-etiquette>