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Academic Correspondence Workshop Textbook

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در سنامه مجموعه کار گاه های مکاتبات دانشگاهی به زبان انگلیسی

مدرس: دکتر محبوبه تقی زاده

هیأت علمی گروه زبان های خارجی دانشگاه علم و صنعت ایران

آکادمی بین الملل دانشگاه علم و صنعت ایران

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پیشگفتار:

درسنامه حاضر باتوجه به درخواست دانشجویان شرکت‌کننده در مجموعه کارگاه‌های مکاتبات دانشگاهی به زبان انگلیسی، توسط سخنران محترم از کتب مختلف گردآوری و ویرایش شده است^۱ تا دانشجویان بتوانند فرصت انتشار مقالات خود را از طریق تعامل سازنده با داوران و سردبیران بهبود بخشند. به طور کلی، این درسنامه شامل انواع مختلفی از ایمیل‌های مورد نیاز در مکاتبات دانشگاهی از جمله ایمیل و نامه رسمی یا غیررسمی به ویراستاران، همکاران و اساتید می‌باشد. همچنین نحوه نگارش و پاسخ به داوران را در بر می‌گیرد. در پایان لازم است از سرکار خانم دکتر تقی‌زاده، هیأت‌علمی محترم دانشگاه علم و صنعت ایران برای همکاری بی‌دریغشان در تدریس مجموعه کارگاه‌ها و تهیه این مجموعه و از دانشگاه علم و صنعت ایران برای پشتیبانی و حمایت در برگزاری چنین نشست‌ها و کارگاه‌های تخصصی سپاسگزاری نمود.

آکادمی بین‌الملل دانشگاه علم و صنعت ایران، تابستان ۱۳۹۸

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برای تهیه این مجموعه از منابع زیر استفاده شده است:

- Turner, A. (2009). *English solutions for engineering and sciences research writing: A guide for English learners to publish in international journals*. Hanyang University, Seoul, Korea.
- Wallwork, A. (2013). *English for academic correspondence and socializing*. New York: Springer.
- Wallwork, A. (2016). *English for academic research*. Switzerland: Springer.

^۱ Compiled and Edited



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UNIT 1

Subject Lines





1.1. Use the subject line to give your complete message

Subject lines are crucial in motivating your recipient to open your email and to respond quickly, rather than setting it aside for future reading. Some people use the subject line to give their complete message. This saves the recipient from having to open the email.

Examples: *Oct 10 lesson shifted to Oct 17. Usual time and place. EOM*

EOM stands for *End of message* and signals to the recipient that the complete message is contained within the subject line and that they don't have to open the email. If you don't write EOM, recipients will not know whether they need or do not need to open the message.

1.2. Consider using a two-part subject line

Some people like to divide their subject line into two parts. The first part contains the context, the second part the details about this context. Here are some examples:

XTC Workshop: postponed till next week

EU project: first draft of review

Manuscript No. X: Revised version

Request for internship by engineering PhD student from University of X

XTC Conf. Beijing. Request to receive your paper entitled: *name of paper*

1.3. Examples of subject lines

Here are some more examples of subject lines. The words in italics are words that you would need to change.

- Attaching a manuscript for the first time to a journal where you have never published before:

Paper (Abstract) submission: *title of your paper*



-
- Attaching revised manuscript to a journal where your paper has already been accepted subject to revisions:

Manuscript No. *1245/14*: revised version

- Reply to referees' report:

Manuscript No. *5648/AA* —Reply to referees

- Permission to quote from paper/research etc.:

Permission to quote your paper entitled *paper title*

- Request for placement/internship:

Request for *internship* by *engineering PhD student* from *University of X*



Unit 2

Salutations





2.1. Spell the recipient's name correctly

In an email you can form a bad impression within just one second. People's names are incredibly important to them. If you make a mistake in the spelling of someone's name (even by using the wrong accent on a letter), you risk instantly annoying them and they may be less willing to carry out whatever request you are asking them.

- Make sure your recipient's name is spelt correctly. Think how you feel when you see your own name is misspelled.
- Some names include accents. Look at the other person's signature and cut and paste it into the beginning of your email—that way you will not make any mistakes either in spelling or in use of accents (e.g., è, ö, ñ).

2.2. Use an appropriate initial salutation and be careful with titles

It is generally safe to write any of the following:

Dear Professor Smith,
Your name was given to me by ...

Dear Dr Smith,
I was wondering whether ...

Dear John Smith
I am writing to inform you that...

Dear John
How are things?

- *Dr* is an accepted abbreviation for “doctor,” that is, someone with a PhD or a doctor of medicine.



-
- The following salutations would generally be considered inappropriate:
 - *Hi Professor Smith* —The word *Hi* is very informal and is thus not usually used in association with words such as *Professor* and *Dr*, as these are formal means of address.
 - *Dear Prof Smith* —Always use the full form of Professor as the abbreviation Prof might be considered too informal or rude.
 - *Dear Smith* —Anglos rarely address each other in emails with just the surname.

If you have had no communication with the person before, then it is always best to use their title.

2.3. Avoid problems when it is not clear if the recipient is male or female, or which is their surname

Similarly, avoid Mr, Mrs, Miss, and Ms—they are not frequently used in emails. By not using them you avoid choosing the wrong one.

So, if you are writing to non-academics, be careful how you use the following titles:

Mr—man (not known if married or not)

Ms—woman (not known if married or not)

Mrs—married woman

Miss—unmarried woman

Thus, a good general rule when replying to someone for the first time is to

- address them using exactly the same name (both first and last name) that they use in their signature
 - precede this name with an appropriate title
 - adopt their style and tone. If you are making the first contact, then it is safer to be formal in order to be sure not to offend anyone. Then as the relationship develops, you can become less (or more) formal as appropriate. In any case, always take into account the reader's customs and culture, remembering that some cultures are much more formal than others.
-



2.4. Be as specific as possible when addressing an email to someone whose name you do not know

On many occasions the exact name of the person is not important; for example, when you are asking for information about products or how to register for a conference.

- Some people like to use the expression *To whom it may concern*, but this expression is really no more useful than having no salutation. Alternatively, you can write something more specific, such as

Dear Session Organizers

Dear Editorial Assistant

Dear Product Manager

2.5. If in doubt how to end your email, use *Best regards*

There are many ways of ending an email in English, but the simplest is *Best regards*. You can use this with practically anyone.

- If you want to be very formal, then you can write *Yours sincerely* or *Yours faithfully* - today there is no difference in usage between these two forms.
- *Best regards* is often preceded with another standard phrase, for example, *Thank you in advance*, or *I look forward to hearing from you*.
- Note the punctuation. Each sentence ends with a full stop, apart from the final salutation (*Best regards*) where you can put either a comma (,) or no punctuation.

2.6. Don't use a sequence of standard phrases in your final salutation

When writing emails in your own language, you may be accustomed to using a sequence of standard phrases at the end of your emails.

Imagine you need to ask your professor for a favor. When writing to North Americans, British people, Australians, etc., normally two phrases would be enough in your final salutation. For example:



Thank you very much in advance (for your kind attention to my request/for your kind collaboration with me).

Best regards

Syed Haque

The above ending is polite and quick to read. The following ending contains too many salutations and is also rather too formal.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation of any help you may be able to give me.

I thank you in advance.

I remain most respectfully yours,

Your student, Syed Haque

- Bear in mind that many people in academia receive up to 100 emails a day; thus, they do not have time to read such a long series of salutations.

2.7. Ensure your signature contains everything that your recipient may need to know

What you include in your signature has some effect on the recipient's perception of who you are and what you do. It is generally a good idea to include most or all of the following.

- Your name
- Your position
- Your department and university/institute
- Your phone number
- The switchboard phone number of your department
- Links to your homepage, LinkedIn, Academia etc.

2.8. Some useful phrases

2.8.1. Initial salutation

Standard

Dear Alfred

Dear Alfred Einstein



Dear Dr Einstein

Dear Professor Einstein

To group/team

Dear all

Hi all

Hi everybody

To all members of the xxx group

To someone you know well

Hi!

Hope you are keeping well.

Hope all is well.

To someone/some people whose names or job positions you don't know

Hi

Hello

Good morning

To whom it may concern * *but try to find the name of the correct person*

Dear Sir/Madam * *but try to find the name of the correct person*

2.8.2. Final salutation

Neutral

Best regards

Kind regards

Best wishes

Regards

Informal

All the best

Have a nice weekend and I'll write when we're back.

See you on Friday.

Hope to hear from you soon.

Speak to you soon.

Cheers

Formal



With kind regards

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Yours faithfully

2.8.3. Phrase before final salutation

Very informal excuses for ending

Must go now because ...

I've got to go now.

That's all for now.

Sending regards to other people

Say hello to ...

Please send my regards to ...

Please convey my best wishes to ...

Wishing people well

Best wishes for the holidays and the new year from all of us here at ...

Have a great Thanksgiving!

Have a nice weekend.

Happy Easter to everyone.

May I wish you a ... *

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful and prosperous New Year.



Unit 3

Structuring the Content of an Email





3.1. Plan your email and be sensitive to the recipient's point of view

Write what the reader wants to read, NOT what you want to write. Think about the following.

- What is the goal of my email?
- Who is my recipient?
- What is their position in the academic hierarchy? How formal do I need to be?
- How busy will my recipient be? How can I get his/her attention?
- What does my recipient already know about the topic of my email?
- What is the minimum amount of information that my recipient needs in order to give me the response I want?
- Why should my recipient do what I want him/her to do?

Think about how your recipient will interpret your message—can the message be interpreted in more than one way, is there any chance it might irritate or offend the recipient, will they be 100% clear about what its purpose is?

3.2. Begin with a greeting + recipient's name

A greeting provides a friendly opening, in the same way as saying “hello” on the phone. A greeting only requires a couple of words, and on the recipient's part will take less than a second to read so you will not be wasting their time. However, if you exchange messages regularly with someone and that person does not make use of greetings, then you can drop these greetings, too.

3.3. Remind the recipient who you are when previous contact has only been brief

You can announce your name and where you met.



My name is Heidi Muller and you may remember that I came up to you after your presentation yesterday. I asked you the question about X. Well, I was wondering ...

Or without announcing your name you can simply jog their memory

Thanks for the advice that you gave me at dinner last night. With regard to what you said about X, do you happen to have any papers on...

3.4. If there has been no previous contact, give reason for your email immediately

Begin by explaining your reason for writing. Avoid giving your name, which the recipient will have already seen before even opening your email. Here are two examples.

I would like to have permission to quote part of the experiment from the following paper. I am planning to use the extract in my PhD thesis. I will of course acknowledge the journal, the author...

I attended your presentation last week. Could you kindly give the link to the online version—thank you. By the way I really enjoyed your talk—it was very interesting and also very pertinent to my field of research which is ...

- Note how the key information is given immediately. Even if the recipient reads nothing after the second line, it does not matter because all the key information is contained within the first line.

- However, if the recipients read only the first two lines of the following two emails, the senders would not get the result desired:

I attended your presentation last week. I really enjoyed your talk—it was very interesting and also very pertinent to my field of research, which is hydro-energy robotics, i.e. water-powered robots. What I found particularly relevant, and which I think our two lines of research have in common, is ... Anyway, the reason I am writing is to ask if you could kindly give me the link to the online version.



My name is Ibrahim Ahmed Saleh and I am a second-year PhD student at the University of Phoenix. My current research activity can be divided into two broad areas. My first line research investigates a question of global governance...

3.5. Make it clear who should read your email and what it is you are requesting

The email below is written in good clear English. But it has a major problem.

Dear Sirs,

I am an enthusiastic and motivated 24 year-old Electronics Engineer with a special interest in RF. I have spent the last six months doing an internship at XTX Semiconductors Inc in Richmond. This internship was part of my Master's and regarded the characterization and modeling of a linear power amplifier for UMTS mobile handsets. While at XTX, I studied linear power amplifier architectures and worked on RF measurements. I will be getting my Master's diploma in March next year. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards

Kim Nyugen

Kim uses a concise style and gives clear details of his activities. But it is not clear

- who the email is addressed to
- what Kim wants

Does Kim want a job—if so, is he writing to the human resources manager? Is he applying to a summer school—if so, is he writing to the course organizer? The recipient has no idea.

- The reason for your email should be clearly stated as early as possible in the email. So Kim could have begun his email like this:

I am interested in applying for the post of junior scientist advertised on your website.

Or:

I would like to apply for a placement in your summer school.



3.6. Organize the information in the most logical order and only include what is necessary

The email below is to the session organizers of a congress. The sender is requesting a delay in the submission.

Dear Session Organizers

At the moment we are not able to submit the draft manuscript within the deadline of 10 October for the SAE Magnets Congress.

The paper is the following:

Manuscript #: 08SFL-00975

Paper Title: Rejection System Auto-Control for a Hybrid BX Motor

Authors: Kai Sim, Angel Sito, Freidrich Sommer – University of Rochdale; Gertrude Simrac, Kaiser Ko – Mangeti Industries S.p.a.

We are very sorry but we underestimated the overall effort required to collect the results to include in the paper.

We would be very grateful to you if we could obtain a delay of a couple of weeks for the draft submission.

We are confident that we will be able to complete and submit the draft manuscript by 21 October.

Best regards

When writing to them (or journal editors) to ask for deadline extensions, tell them immediately exactly when you think you will be able to submit your manuscript. It is also a good idea not to force the recipient to read a mass of non-essential information before you finally tell them your request. The above email could thus be rewritten as:



I would like to request a delay in submission of manuscript #: 08SFL-00975 until 21 October.

I hope this does not cause any inconvenience. Best regards.

You may think the above is rather direct, but the recipient will appreciate the fact that he/she only needs to spend three seconds on reading your email.

Here is another example of a short email which makes its point immediately and clearly.

I inadvertently submitted my manuscript #08CV-0069 for the SAE Magnets Congress, as an “Oral only Presentation” instead of “Written and Oral Presentation.” Please could you let me know how I can change the status of my paper. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

3.7. Avoid templates for beginnings and endings

Here is an email from a student who has booked hotel accommodation for a congress.

I'm Carla Giorgi, a PhD student from the University of Pisa, Italy.

I'm the author of a paper at ISXC16.

Yesterday, I booked my hotel room using the forms on ISXC16 website.

I'm waiting for confirmation from you.

Please could you tell me if there are some problems with my reservation, if it was not successful, and when I'll be contacted.

I apologize for my scholastic English, I hope to clearly have explained my problem.

Thanking you in advance, I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best regards,

Carla Giorgi



It would have actually been quicker for Carla if she had begun from the third line of her email and ended at the fifth line. Only write what the recipient needs to know. This will save time for both you and them.

3.8. Ensure that recipients in different time zones will interpret dates and times correctly

Researchers work in an international environment over many time zones.

- For maintenance reasons, the server will be not available tomorrow for all the day.
- The server will not be available from 09.00 (London time) until 18.00 on Saturday 17 October.
- British English: 12 March 2024
- American English: March 12, 2024

3.9. The last words

Here are some sentences that give a positive feeling at the end of an email.

- It will be great to see you at the conference.
- Thank you so much for all your help with this.
- I really appreciate your time.

3.10. Be explicit in the main text of your email that you have attached a document

Recipients often don't check that there is an attachment, unless you specifically use the words *attach*, *attached*, *attaching* or *attachment* in the main text. Ensure that you use a phrase such as:

Please find attached ...

Attached is ...

I am attaching ...

You will notice in the attachment that ...

- Note that the phrase *In attachment please find* is not correct English.



3.11. Useful phrases

Stressing main points and drawing attention to something

What I really want to stress here is ...

The important thing is ...

The key factor is ...

Can I draw your attention to ...

What I need to know is ...

It is crucial for me to ...

I cannot stress how important this is.

Indicating change in subject

One more thing ...

While I remember ...

Before I forget ...

By the way ...

Also ...

Summarizing and concluding

So, just to summarize ...

So basically I am asking you two things. First, ... And second ...

If you could answer all three of my questions I would be most grateful.

Invitations

Inviting

In accordance with our previous conversations, I am very glad to invite you to ... *

I sincerely hope that you will be able to accept this invitation, and look forward to hosting you
in *name of town*.



I was wondering whether you might be interested in joining the Scientific Advisory Board of ... *

I am writing to you to find out whether you would be willing to ...

Accepting

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to ... *

I would be delighted to be a member of ... *

It is very kind of you to invite me to ...

Declining

Many thanks for your kind invitation, but unfortunately ...

I am really sorry but I am going to have to turn down your invitation to ...

Thank you very much for your kind invitation. However, I am afraid that ...

Thanks very much for inviting me to ... I am really sorry but I am afraid I cannot accept.

I regret that I cannot accept your invitation at the present time because ... *

I'm sorry to inform you that I do not have sufficient expertise in *topic* to be able to review the paper.

So it is with great regret that I am afraid that I will have to decline your invitation. *

Withdrawing acceptance

I am sorry to have to inform you that I am no longer able to ...

Due to family problems I am sorry to have to inform you that ...

I am sorry to give you such short notice and I sincerely hope that this won't cause you too much trouble.



Unit 4

Building a Relationship and Deciding the Level of Formality





Convert these informal phrases into formal phrases

1. Re your email dated ...
2. This is just to let you know that ...
3. Attached is ...
4. I'll call you next week to tell you what time I'll be arriving.
5. Thanks in advance.
6. Sorry that I haven't got back to you sooner.

4.1. How to judge the level of formality

Below are some guidelines to enable you to distinguish between formal and informal expressions in emails.

Formal	less formal
<i>We have pleasure in confirming the acceptance of your abstract for ...</i>	<i>This is to confirm</i> that your abstract has been accepted for ...
<i>Should you</i> need any clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact us.	<i>If you</i> have any questions, please let us know.
<i>You are requested</i> to acknowledge this email.	<i>Please</i> acknowledge this email.
<i>It is necessary that</i> I have the report by Tuesday.	<i>Please</i> could I have the report by Tuesday?

- The examples below show how a simple concept, such as acknowledging receipt of a mail, can be expressed in many different ways from completely detached to quite warm.

I confirm receipt of your fax.

This is just to confirm that I received your fax.

Just to let you know that your fax got through.

Thanks for your fax.



Formal: modal verbs

• The four modal auxiliaries *may*, *can*, *could*, and *would* are often used to make a request sound more courteous and less direct. Compare the following pairs of sentences:

May I remind you that we are still awaiting your report on manuscript No. 1342/2 ...
We are still awaiting your report on manuscript No. 1342/2 ...

Can you kindly check with her that this is OK.
Check that this is OK.

Could you please keep me informed of any changes you plan to make to the presentation.
Keep me informed of any changes you plan to make to the presentation.

Would you like me to Skype you?
Do you want me to Skype you?

• In a similar way, *won't be able to* is often preferred to *cannot*, and *would like* or *wish to want*. Both *cannot* and *want* tend to sound too abrupt.

I'm sorry but I *won't be able to* give you any feedback on your manuscript until next week.

We regret to inform you that we *will not be able to* offer your students any special rate for attending the congress.

• The modal verb *may* is extremely useful whenever you want to give your mail a formal tone: I would be grateful for any further information you *may* be able to give me about ...

You *may* also check the status of your manuscript by logging into your account at <http://manuscript.zzxx.com/account>.

Formal: nouns

When there is a predominance of nouns rather than verbs, it gives an email a feeling of distance and formality:

Please inform me of the time of your *arrival*.

Please let me know when you *will be arriving*.

To the best of our *knowledge*.



As far as we *know*.

Formal: multi-syllable words

Compare the following pairs of verbs. The first verb is multi-syllable and formal, and the second is monosyllable or a phrasal verb:

advise/let someone know, apologize/be sorry, assist/help, attempt/try, clarify/make clear, commence/start, consider/think about, contact/get in touch, enter/go in, evaluate/look into, examine/look at, inform/tell, perform/carry out, receive/get, reply/get back to, require/want, utilize/use

The same also applies to nouns, for example, *possibility* vs *chance*.

4.2. Omission of subject and other parts of speech

A clear sign that an email is informal is when the subject of the verb and/or the auxiliary are missing.

Informal	Formal
<i>Been</i> very busy recently.	<i>I have been</i> very busy recently.
<i>Appreciate</i> your early reply.	<i>I would appreciate</i> your early reply.
<i>Hope</i> to hear from you soon.	<i>I hope</i> to hear from you soon.
<i>Speak</i> to you soon.	<i>I will speak</i> to you soon.
<i>Looking</i> forward to your reply.	<i>I am looking</i> forward to your reply.
<i>Will</i> be in touch.	<i>I will</i> be in touch.
<i>Just</i> a quick update on ...	<i>This is just</i> a quick update on ...
Have forwarded Carlos <i>copy</i> of <i>ppt</i> to <i>personal</i> email too.	I have forwarded Carlos <i>a copy</i> of <i>the presentation</i> to <i>his personal</i> email too.



4.3. Use appropriate language and don't mix levels of formality

Below is an email written by a PhD student to a professor. Much of the email is formal, as is appropriate given the student/professor relationship. However, the parts in italics are very informal, and are thus inappropriate.

Dear Professor Anastasijevic,

I hope you *have been having a really good time* since our meeting in Belgrade. I have started to prepare for my period in your *lab* and first of all I'm trying to get a visa!

I would be very grateful if you could kindly tell me how to obtain the DS2019 document in order to request the visa.

I would like to thank you in advance and *have a great Xmas*.

Cheers,

Lamia Abouchabkis

The following email from a PhD student sounds very strange with its incredible mixture of polite English mixed with chatroom/text message style.

Dear Professor Adrian

I am pleased that you enjoyed my presentation. Dunno how useful it is.

I am happy if u r ok wid it.

Best regards

It is always worth remembering who you are writing to, and that not all people of every generation write in the same way.

4.4. Note any differences in style and level of formality between English and your language

A more appropriate version, for example, for sending to a professor in the USA, would be:



Dear Professor Gabbitas

I am an assistant professor in the department of Engineering, at the Islamic University in Bangladesh, where I am doing research into reducing fuel emissions. I would be very interested to continue my studies for a PhD under your supervision. From my CV (see attached) you will see that I have been working on very similar areas as you, and I feel I might be able to make a useful contribution to your team.

I would be grateful if you would kindly send me information regarding admission procedures and any financial support that might be available.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Hussain Choudhury

4.5. Be careful of your tone when asking people to do something for you

One of the most common reasons for writing an email is to get someone to do something for you. Here is an example of a request written in various ways from very direct (using an imperative) to overly cautious and extremely polite.

Revise the manuscript for me.

Will you revise the manuscript for me?

Can you revise the manuscript for me?

Could you revise the manuscript for me?

Would you mind revising the manuscript for me?

Do you think you could revise the manuscript for me?

Would you mind very much revising the manuscript for me?

If it's not a problem for you could you revise the manuscript for me?

If you happen to have the time could you revise the manuscript for me?

Below is an email from one co-author of a paper to another co-author.

Here is a first version of the manuscript. Read and check everything: in particular, you have to work on the introduction and prepare Fig 1.



You should send it back to me by the end of this month at the latest.

I ask you to suggest also some referees that would be suitable for reviewing the paper.

The email could be improved as follows:

Here is a first version of the manuscript. Please could you read and check everything. In particular, it would be great if you could complete/revise the introduction and also prepare Figure 1.

Given that our deadline is the first week of next month, I would be grateful to receive your revisions by the end of this month.

The editor might ask us to suggest some referees to review our paper, so if you have any ideas please let me know.

4.6. Show your recipient respect and motivate them to reply

Below is an email a university professor received from a student he had taught the previous year.

Subject: hlep with cv

Hi pfof Wallwoark

how r u? do u remember me? u said in your lessons that we could send u r cvs for correction.

in attachment is mine. pls I need it for tommorow nighth if poss. thankx u.

You need to change your email writing style depending on who you are writing to (their age, position, nationality). A more suitable version would be:

Subject: help with CV

Dear Professor Wallwork

I attended your scientific papers course last year. I am the student from Iran who told you about Iranian writing style. I was wondering whether you might have time to correct my CV (see attached). Unfortunately, I need it for tomorrow - my professor only told me about it today. I know it is asking a lot but if you could find 10 minutes to correct it, I would really appreciate it.



Please let me know if you need any further information about how Iranian academics write.

Best regards

The email could have been written as follows:

Subject: help with CV

Dear Professor Wallwork

I attended your scientific papers course last year - it was really useful and since then I have had two papers published. Thank you!

I seem to remember that during your course you offered to correct our CVs for us.

So although it is a year later, I was wondering whether you might have time to correct my CV (see attached). Unfortunately, I need it for tomorrow – my professor only told me about it today. I know it is asking a lot but if you could find 10 minutes to correct it, I would really appreciate it and I am sure it would make a significant difference to my chances of getting the post.

Thank you very much in advance.

4.7. Maintain a friendly relationship

Whenever you write an email, always be aware that there is probably more than one way to interpret what you have written and that this other way may cause offence. So, before you send your email, check for potential misinterpretations and rewrite the offending phrase.

Here is what appears to be an inoffensive reminder.

For your reference I remind you that it is VERY important to always specify your current workstation IP address.

Here are two different ways of rewriting the sentence:

Just a quick reminder—don't forget to specify your current workstation IP address. Thanks!



I'd just like to remind you that the IP address of a workstation must always be specified.

4.8. Adopt a non-aggressive approach

If you have something negative to say, it is advisable not to adopt an aggressive approach.

Aggression is more likely to aggravate the situation than solve it. Compare:

Aggressive	non-aggressive
You have sent us the wrong manuscript.	You appear to have sent us the wrong manuscript. It seems we've been sent the wrong manuscript.
I need it now.	I appreciate that this is a busy time of year for you but I really do need it now.
I have not received a reply to my email dated ...	I was wondering whether you had had a chance to look at the email I sent you dated ... (see below)

Recipients do not like to be treated like schoolchildren or be made to feel guilty; thus, in most contexts the phrases below should be deleted:

This is the second time I have written to request ...

I am still awaiting a response to my previous email ...

As explained in my first email,

As clearly stated in my previous email,

4.9. Add a friendly phrase at the end of an email

There are various phrases that you can use at the end of an email, particularly if you think the rest of the email may be a little strong. These include the following:

Have a nice day.

Have a great weekend.

Keep up the good work.



4.10. A request for an article

Dear Dr. Christensen,

I'm a PhD Student at the Department of Engineering, at the University of Pisa in Italy.

I am doing research into energy-saving solutions for p2p overlay networks (e.g., Red BitTorrent).

I'm writing to you because I'm interested in your paper:

J. Breakwater and O. Christensen, "Red BitTorrents? The answer to everything".

I would appreciate it very much if you could send me a copy by email. By the way, I have found your previous papers really interesting; they have been a great stimulus to my research.

Thanks in advance.

Regards

Katia Orlandi

Hello Katia

Attached is our paper which we are going to present at the Fifth International Workshop on Red Communications next June.

4.11. Minimize mistakes in your English by writing short and simple emails

Keep your emails short and simple.

The following are two versions of an email from a French student who wishes to do an internship at another institute.

Original version (ov)

Dear Professor Gugenheimer,

I am Melanie Duchenne, the french student who Holger Schmidt told you about few days ago.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for the opportunity you afford me to spend with your staff a short period, which would be extremely useful for me in order to obtain the master degree.



I have been advised by Holger to communicate to you my preference as soon as possible, and I beg your pardon for not having done it earlier, due to familiar problems. Then, if possible, the best option for me would be a two-months period, from the beginning of June to the end of July. Waiting for your reply, I wish to thank you in advance for your kindness.

Best regards,

Melanie Duchenne

Revised version (rv)

Dear Professor Gugenheimer,

I am the French student who Holger Schmidt told you about.

Firstly, I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to work with your team.

If possible, the best option for me would be June 1 – July 31.

I apologize for not letting you know the dates sooner.

Best regards,

The RV is much more concise and precise. All non-essential information (from the recipient's point of view) has been removed. Reducing the amount of text reduces the number of mistakes. Below are the mistakes in the OV, with the correct version on the right.

few days ago = a few days ago

the opportunity you afford me = the opportunity you are giving me

obtain the master degree = to get my Master's [degree]

I have been adviced = I have been advised by Holger *or* Holger advised me

familiar problems = family problems

a two-months period = a two-month period

All of the above mistakes have been removed, simply by reducing the amount of the text.

4.12. Use short sentences and choose the best grammatical subject

The sentence below is a 48-word sentence written by a female PhD student. It contains three parts. It is not hard to read.



I am a PhD student in psycholinguistics and one of the professors in my department, Stavros Panageas, kindly gave my your name as he thought you might be able to provide me with some data on the use of the genitive in Greek dialects of the 17th century.

Nevertheless it requires more effort than this alternative:

Your name was given to me by Professor Stavros Panageas. I am doing a PhD on the use of the genitive in Greek. Prof Panageas told me you have a database on 17th century Greek dialects and I was wondering if I might have access to it.

- Having short sentences helps your recipients locate the key information in your sentence with the minimal mental or visual effort

4.13. Use the correct word/phrase order

Your paper was sent to me by Wolfgang Froese, a colleague of mine at the XTC lab in Munich.

I found it extremely useful and I would like...

I am writing to inform you that unfortunately our manuscript will be delayed. The delay is due to...

Be careful of the location of the word *please* as it can give a very different tone to the sentence.

Please can you let me know as soon as possible. (neutral)

Hugo please note that... (neutral)

Please Hugo, note that... (irritated)

Please is not usually followed by a comma.

4.14. Don't exaggerate or sound insincere

Here is an extract for a request for an internship. Professors in the West might find the language too formal, exaggerated or insincere, particularly the parts in italics. In addition, the two paragraphs seem to say practically the same thing.



I am interested in doing a summer internship under your guidance in *your esteemed organization* from May–July next year with the intention of enhancing my knowledge and exploring *my academic and intellectual interest* so as to prepare myself for doctoral study in that particular subject.

My purpose of writing to you is to obtain a creative, challenging and motivating internship in your research group and I am interested to pursue my summer internship under your guidance, where I can utilize my scientific and technological skills to the fullest. I am aware of the *superior quality of research work* at your institute.

The email below is a request for an internship.

Dear Professor Smith,

We met last month when you were doing a seminar at the Department of Biology in *name of town*. I am a student of Professor Ihsan (Vibravoid Project). You mentioned it might be possible for me to work at your lab for two months this summer.

I was wondering if the invitation is still open, if so would June to July fit in with your plans?

My department will, of course, cover all my costs.

I would be grateful if you could let me know within the next ten days so that I will still be in time to book cheap flights and get my accommodation organized.

I look forward to hearing from you.



Unit 5

Requests and Replies





5.1. Lay out your request clearly

Below is a request to register for a conference. Unfortunately, it forces the recipient to read the mail carefully in order to understand exactly what the request is.

Dear Secretariat of the 5th XTC Ph.D. Symposium,

My Supervisor and I would like to register for the XTC Symposium but we couldn't find any registration form in your website. I would be very grateful to you if you could suggest me the best way to register for the event. Moreover, would it be possible to pay the registration fee by credit card? Finally, is the preliminary program available for download?

Thank you very much in advance for your kind cooperation.

Best regards

Here is a better organized version of the above:

Dear Secretariat

Please can you answer the following questions:

1. how can I register for the 5th XTC Ph.D. Symposium?
2. can I pay by credit card?
3. where can I download the preliminary program?

Best regards

The writer of the email below is a student who has already organized an internship in a university in the USA. He is now dealing with the secretary who is helping him with various bureaucratic procedures in preparation for his visit.

Dear Ms Jackson,

I apologize for my late reply, at the moment I am still waiting for the funding letter. Please find attached to this e-mail the DS 20-19 form, duly filled in with all my personal details. As far as



the copy of my passport is concerned, I am sending you a copy of my old one, but please note that I need to apply for a new electronic passport complying with the US foreign passport requirements. I will send the application for my new passport this week and start with the visa procedure as soon as I can. I will keep you up to date with the progress of my visa application. I would be grateful if you could provide me some advice on accommodation, since I am now also trying to look for somewhere preferably within walking distance of the department. I hope you have completed the XTC poster, sorry again for my late reply to your last e-mail. I hope this hasn't caused you any problems.

The above email is very confusing. A more helpful version would be:

Dear Ms Jackson,

I just wanted to update you on my progress with getting all the documents ready.

- DS 20-19 form: see attached.
- Passport: I am attaching a jpg of my passport; however, tomorrow I will apply for a new electronic passport in order to comply with the US foreign passport requirements.
- Visa: I made the application three weeks ago, I hope to have some news by the end of this week.
- Funding letter: I should have this ready early next week - thanks for your patience.

Just a couple of other things: 1) Do you have any suggestions for finding accommodation within walking distance of the department? 2) Did you manage to complete the XTC poster?

Thank you.

I am very sorry it has taken me so long to get back to you, but bureaucracy in my country is a nightmare!

5.2. Don't assume that the reader will understand the importance of or reason for your request



Imagine you want one of your co-authors, who also happens to be a native speaker of English, to review the English of your paper.

Simply writing the following email may not be enough:

Dear Katie

I have some good news - our paper has been accepted for publication! But this might be a rather devious way to convince someone to do something for you. Would you mind reading through the paper and making corrections using 'Track Changes' on Word?

Best regards

Natacha

Compare the above version with the version below:

I was wondering whether you could do me a favour.

The paper we co-wrote has been accepted for publication, but subject to a review of the English language.

I contacted a professional editing agency, but they want 375 euros to do the job, which to me seems a little excessive.

Would you mind reading through the paper and making corrections using 'Track Changes' on Word?

As you can imagine, research funds here in Spain are very limited, so anything you could do to help would be much appreciated.

The revised version explains

- the situation - paper accepted subject to English review
- what you have done to try to rectify the problem - contacted editing agency
- why your solution failed - too expensive
- request
- why the request is so important

5.3. Motivate the recipient to reply by empathizing with their situation or by paying them a compliment



Most recipients are more likely to meet your requests if you seem to show some understanding of their situation or if you appreciate their skills in some way. Here are some typical phrases that senders use to motivate their recipients to reply.

I know that you are very busy but ...

Sorry to bother you but ...

I have heard that you have a mountain of work at the moment but ...

Any feedback you may have, would be very much appreciated.

I have an urgent problem that requires your expertise.

I really need your help to ...

I cannot sort this out by myself ...

5.4. Give the recipient all the information they need

When you are making a request asking for a placement in someone's lab, you need to provide your recipient with all the information they need to assess whether there would be benefits for them in having you in their team. The email below is a good example that is likely to motivate the recipient in helping the student to get a placement.

Subject: Laboratory placement – Dr. Rezaee's student

Dear Professor Janson

I am a PhD student at the University of X. I attended the ACE-Y conference last week and I found your seminar very interesting, the part about the finite element formulation was particularly useful.

I saw on your webpage is it possible to have a placement period in your lab. It would be a real pleasure for me to join your research group and do some further research into the formulation of an efficient finite element for the adhesive layer.

My research covers almost exactly the same topics:

1. FE calculations of complex bonded structures



2. Efficient techniques to reduce d.o.f

3. Enhancing adhesive strength

The area where I think **I could really add value would be in enhancing adhesive strength**. I have attached a paper and some recent results, which I hope you will find both interesting and useful. I believe my approach could work in conjunction with yours and really improve efficiency.

If it would suit you, I could come from April next year, for a 3–6-month period. I would be able to get funding from my university to cover the costs of a placement period, so I need no grant or scholarship.

Please find attached my CV with the complete list of my publications and a letter of recommendation from my tutor, Professor Shankar.

Thank you in advance for any help you may be able to give me.

Maryam Rahimi

Maryam structures her email as follows; she

- explains who she is and how she knows of Janson
- makes a compliment on Janson's seminar
- states why she is writing to Janson
- gives a short summary of her research area highlighting its similarities with Janson's
- highlights where she could add value—she uses bold to attract Janson's attention (he may just be scanning the email to see whether it is worth him reading it)
- says when she is available and that she already has funding
- attaches her CV and other information that provides evidence that she would be a useful addition to Janson's team
- mentions the name of her tutor (who through the literature may be known to Janson)

She also uses a clear subject line which should motivate Janson to open the email.



5.5. Include all the relevant information that the recipient needs to assess your request

An internship could lead to a considerable enhancement in your career possibilities. It is thus wise to give the following information to the person who might be hosting you:

- some details about what you are proposing in terms of scientific content. Also, give the professor other possible areas that you could work on together
- your ideal dates and other dates that you could come
- an indication of whether or not you will be financially autonomous
- a letter of recommendation from your professor
- references from other people

The idea is that it really seems that you want to work with them and that you are trying to make their life easier by providing them with all the information they may want to know.

5.6. When asking someone to review your work, give explicit instructions

When you ask someone to informally review your work, make sure first of all that you do so politely. You cannot say *Please could you revise my manuscript*. You need to tell them what to focus on, bearing in mind that they may not have time to do a thorough job. Here is an example:

Dear Carlos

I hope all is well with you.

I am currently working on a paper that I would like to submit to the journal's special issue for the conference. The paper is the extension of the work that I presented as a poster during the conference, which I think you saw. The draft is still at quite an early stage, but I would really appreciate your input.

I know that you have a lot of expertise in this area and I am sure my paper would really benefit from your input. In any case, I have what I think are some really important new results, so I



hope that you will find this paper of interest too. Obviously, I don't want to take up too much of your time, so perhaps you might just focus on the Discussion and Results. Also, if you could quickly browse through the Literature Cited to make sure I haven't missed any important papers (yours are all there by the way!).

The deadline for submission is on Oct 10, so if you could get your revisions back to me by the end of this month (i.e., September) that would be great.

I do appreciate the fact that you must be very busy, so please do not hesitate to let me know if you don't have the time.

Thank you very much in advance.

Maria

5.7. Asking a person to give a presentation

Dear Dr Suzuki

I hope you had a good summer. When we met before the summer vacation you told me that you were getting some interesting results in your experiments. I was wondering if you had now completed testing and whether you would be willing to share those results with me.

At my department we are planning a series of workshops on XYZ in November this year. Given your international reputation and your expertise in the field, I was wondering whether you might be interested in giving a series of seminars. Your travel and accommodation expenses would of course be paid for by my department.

5.8. Give deadlines

You will increase your chances of people responding to your requests if you give them a specific deadline. This is much more effective than saying *as soon as possible* or *at your earliest convenience*, as these two phrases give no idea of the urgency of the sender. Typical phrases you can use are as follows:



I need it *within* the next two days.

He wants it *by* 11 tomorrow morning at the latest.

I don't actually need it *until* next week, Tuesday would be fine.

I need it some time *before* the end of next week.

If someone writes to you saying *Could you revise the section as soon as possible*. You can say:

I should be able to get the revisions back to you *by* the end of this month/*within* the next 10 days.

I am sorry but I won't be able to start work on it *until* Monday/*before* next week at the earliest.

5.9. Replying to requests

Let's imagine that you are Raul, a Spanish researcher, and that you have a collaboration with Peter, a British researcher. Peter sends you the email below.

Hi Raul

I hope all is well with you. I was wondering if you could do me a couple of favors. Attached are two documents. The first is an Abstract that I would like you to read and hear your comments on. It is actually 50 words over the limit required by the conference organizers, so if you could find any way to remove a few words that would be great. Also attached is the proposal for the request for funding - for some reason I can't find the email addresses of the people in the Research Unit in Madrid, so could you possibly forward it to them? Thanks. Then finally, you mentioned last time we met that you said that you had a useful bibliographical reference that you thought I should look up, do you think you could send it to me. Thanks very much and sorry to bother you with all this.

If we don't speak before, I hope you have a Happy Christmas!

Best regards

Peter

You could decide to write your reply under Peter's text as follows:



version 1

Hi Peter

Good to hear from you. Yes, I am happy to read your Abstract and I will try to reduce the word count. I have forwarded the request for funding proposal to the members of the Madrid RU and I put you in cc. Please find below the references I mentioned:

Sweitzer BJ, Cullen DJ, How well does a journal's peer review process function? A survey of authors' opinions (JAMA1994; 272:152-3)

Let me express my warmest wishes to you and your family for a very happy Christmas and a New Year full of both personal and professional gratifications.

Best regards

Raul

5.10. Insert friendly comments within the body of the sender's text

You can insert friendly remarks within the body of an email you have received. Let's imagine that you are a researcher who lives and works in Pisa, Italy. You have just been to Prague to give some seminars. The email below is from the Czech person who organized the seminars for you. You have inserted your comments within her email.

>Hi Paolo

>I hope you had a good trip back to Pisa.

Unfortunately there was a three hour delay due to fog, but anyway I got home safely.

>I just wanted to say that it was good to meet you last week. I thought your seminars were very productive.

Thank you. Yes, I was very pleased by the way they went and I was very impressed by the level of knowledge of your students.

>Say hello to Luigi.



I will do. And please send my regards to Professor Blazkova.

Thank you once again for organizing the seminars and I hope to see you again in the not too distant future.

>Best regards

>Hanka

5.11. Postdoctoral Grant

Below is a request for postdoctoral grant.

Why is this an effective letter? Underline any useful phrases you find.

Postdoctoral grant, EXEGO project

Dear Dr. Jill Cohen

I am very interested in the postdoctoral grant related to the EXEGO project “*Design of a decision matrix to assess the link between selfies and selfish behavior*”, with vacancy number: DPW 08–40.

My background is closely related to the field of cognitive selfish behavior. During my Bachelor’s studies in Psychology I participated in projects regarding smoking in the presence of young children, unauthorized parking in disabled parking spaces, financial trading, and other non-altruistic behaviors. In addition, my M.S. degree focused on *Acts of Neuro-narcissism in Top League Football Players*. During this period I developed a method to assess the level of narcissistic and selfish behaviors among young extremely wealthy people who had suddenly been catapulted into the public eye.

I am currently finishing my Ph.D. in Postmodern Relational Psychology at the School of Advanced Neurological Studies in Manchester (UK). The work I performed during my Ph.D. studies investigated the ego pathway in the Manchester United first team using a transgenic approach. Part of this research was recently published (*Ego pathways as an indicator of selfish*



behavior in public. *Functional Psychology*. 35(7): 606-618). Additionally, I published the results of this work as an oral presentation at the XVI Congress of the Federation of European Psychologists (FEP) held in Tampere, Finland, in August last year.

The topic of the research position you are offering is fully related to the experience I acquired during my M.S. and Ph.D. studies. I am confident that my acquaintance with Neurology and Psychology, including the construction of decision matrices, binary vectors, behavior transformations, and analysis of the selfish gene will allow me to successfully perform this project.

I enclose my CV where you can find more details on my research experience.

Best regards,

5.12. Request to Attend a Workshop

Template

The parts to change are in italics. Parts in square brackets are optional.

Workshop on psycholinguistics and statistical tools - Atlantis 13/14 July.

I am a PhD student in *psycholinguistics* at *Melbourne University* and I would very much like to attend your workshop. I am writing a thesis about how *a researcher's name can influence the research field that they choose*. This project has *involved compiling lists of surnames such as Wood, Bugg, Gold and Wordsworth in order to understand the incidence of such names in the fields of forestry, entomology, economics and linguistics, respectively*. To carry out this research *I am using an innovative statistical tool, developed by me and some fellow PhD students, called SirName*.

I believe my research area matches the topic of the workshop because:

- x
- y
- z

[In addition, I think I could share my knowledge in:

- x
 - y
-



- z]

These three points are *at the cutting edge of research in this area*, and fortunately I am working in a top laboratory [name of lab] where I have acquired skills in In fact, I believe participants may be interested in learning new techniques about ...

I look forward to hearing from you.

5.13. Summer School

Template

I would like to apply for a place at your summer school.

I am particularly interested in attending because

- x
- y
- z

I'm passionate about neurosciences and I'd like to learn much more about the techniques used in this field.

The main topic of my research is neuroengineering techniques, in particular imaging analysis both in-vitro and in-vivo and neuronal models. My research focuses on understanding the neural basis of some brain disorders [*link to personal webpage where the candidate's research is outline in detail*], such as autism, so I'm especially interested in your courses on neuropsychological diseases.

I'm at the beginning of my PhD so I have a lot to learn. I think your school would be a wonderful opportunity both to have a deeper theoretical background and to get involved in the activities at your laboratories. If possible, I would like to participate in two different projects: fMRI experiments and microscopic techniques. This would thus enable me to gain experience in both areas of my research.

Finally, I think that attending your school would be perfect for learning about the work of other students and researchers, to exchange opinions, and thus to increase my knowledge and my experience in neurosciences.

I look forward to hearing from you.

5.13. Useful phrases

5.13.1. Asking favors/giving help



Asking

I found your email address on the web, and am writing to you in the hope that you may be able to help me.

Please could you ...

I was wondering if by any chance you ...

I wonder if you might be able to help me.

I would be extremely grateful if you could ...

Would you have any suggestions on how to ...

It would be very helpful for me if I could pick your brains on ...

I would like to ask your advice about ...

Showing awareness that you are taking up recipient's time

I realize you must be very busy at the moment but if you could spare a moment I would be most grateful.

If it wouldn't take up too much of your time then I would be very grateful if you could ...

Clearly, I don't want to take up too much of your time but if you could ...

Obviously, I don't expect you to but any help you could give me would be much appreciated.

Accepting

No problem. I'll get back to you as soon as ...

I'd be happy to help out with ...

I'd be happy to help.

Declining

I'm sorry but ...

I'd like to help but ...

Unfortunately ...

At the moment I'm afraid it's just not possible.

5.13.2. Making inquiries

General inquiries

Hi, I have a couple of simple requests:

Could you please tell me ...

I would like to know ...

Could you possibly send me ...



I have some questions about ...

Asking to receive papers

I would like to receive a copy of your PhD Thesis “Metalanguage in Swahili.”

Last week I attended the workshop on X. I was interested in your presentation on “Y.” Have you by any chance written a paper on that topic? If so, I would very much appreciate it if you could email me a copy.

I am a PhD student currently doing a review on the link between right-wing politics and the perception of social justice and I am interested in your article "Social Justice: Are you kidding?" I would much appreciate it if you could send me the article if possible.

Ordering products, materials, chemicals, etc.

What do I need to do to order a ...?

I would like to know if I can order an xxx directly from you ...

I am looking for an xx. Do you have one in stock?

Ending an inquiry

Any information you could give me would be greatly appreciated.

Thanks in advance.

I look forward to receiving ...

Following up an inquiry

Thank you for ...

Would it be possible for you to send me a bit more information on ...

Could you please describe what is included in the ...

5.13.3. Replying to inquiries

Thanking

Thank you for contacting me ...

I am pleased to hear that you found my paper / presentation / report / seminar useful ...

Making reference

Regarding your queries about ...

In response to your questions:

Here is the information you requested:

As requested, I am sending you ...

Below you will find the answers to your questions ...

With reference to your request for ...



Following our telephone conversation about ...

Asking for details

Before I can answer your questions, I need further details re the following:

Before I can do anything, I need ...

Could you tell me exactly why you need x.

Adding details

Please note that ...

I would like to point out that ...

As far as I know ...

I'd also like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention ...

May I take this opportunity to ...

Telling recipients they can ask for further info

Please feel free to email, fax, or call if you have any questions.

Any questions, please ask.

Hope this is OK. Please contact Helen if you need any further details.

If you need any further details do not hesitate to contact me.

Should you have any questions please let us know.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need any further clarifications.

Ending

Please let me know if this helps.

I hope to be able to give you a definite answer soon.

Once again, thank you for contacting me.

5.13.4. Talking about the next step

Telling recipient how you want them to proceed

Could you please go through the manuscript and make any revisions you think necessary.

Please have a look at the enclosed report and let me know what you think.

If you could organize the meeting for next Tuesday, I'll send everyone the details.

Telling recipient how you will proceed

Thanks for your mail. It will take me a while to find all the answers you need but I should be able to get back to you early next week.



Re your request. I'll look into it and send you a reply by the end of the week.

I will contact you when I return.

Sorry, but I'm actually going on holiday tomorrow, so I'm afraid I won't be able to get back to you for a couple of weeks.

Asking recipient how they want you to proceed

Do you want me to ...?

Would you like me to ...?

Shall I ..?.

Do we need to ...?

Let me know whether ...

5.13.5. Giving and responding to deadlines

Telling recipient by when you want a reply

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future/soon/before the end of the week. Please could you get back to me by the end of today/this morning/as soon as possible. I hope you can reply this morning so I can then get things moving before leaving tonight.

We would appreciate an early reply. Please let me have your feedback by Friday so I can send you a draft schedule next week.

I know it is a very sharp deadline. So if you don't have time to answer my question, please don't worry about it.

Looking forward to your reply.

When you will reply

I should be able to send you the document tomorrow/within the next two days/first thing Thursday morning.

I'll get back to you before the end of the day.

I'm sorry but I won't be able to give you any response until ...

Saying what you will do

I will send you all the details re ... in due course.

With regard to your email dated ..., I will talk to my colleagues and get back to you ASAP.

Saying what you've done

Given the new data that we now have available, we have ...

I have made the following changes: ...

Asking for confirmation if what you have done is acceptable



I hope that is OK—if not please raise with Mike.

Is that OK?

Asking to be kept informed

Please keep me informed of any developments.

Please keep me up to date.

Please let us know the outcome.



Unit 6

Reference Letters





6.1. What is a reference?

When applying for an internship or a research position, the candidate is often asked for a 'reference'. A reference is the name of someone (typically a professor) who knows you personally, has tutored you, or whose lab you have worked in.

On your CV/resume, it is common to put the names of three or four references, located at the bottom of your CV and laid out as follows:

Provide the following information:

- name
- their relationship to you
- where they work
- their email address (so that the HR person can contact them)
- their website (so that HR can learn more about them)

Professor Ali Rezaee (my thesis tutor), Iran University of Science and Technology,
arezaee@iust.ac.ir, www.Alirezaee.com

Professor Maryam Ahmadi (in whose lab I did a 3-month internship), Amirkabir University,
m.ahmadi@au.ac.ir, www.amirkabir.edu/Maryamahmadi

6.2. Asking for a reference letter

A reference letter is a letter written by your referee. It covers both your academic achievements and your personality.

The best time to ask for a reference is when you are still in daily contact with your 'referee', i.e. while you are still doing an internship or PhD at the referee's department.



6.3. Typical questions that a reference letter addresses

The letter typically answers the following questions, which the referee may be asked to answer on an online form provided by the university where you are applying for a position.

1. How long do you know the applicant and in what capacity?
2. What do you consider to be the applicant's main strengths and weaknesses?
3. Can you give one or two specific examples of the applicant's performance?
4. What is your opinion of the applicant's suitability for an MBA/PhD program?
5. Is there any other information which you feel is relevant?

Alternatively your referee may be contacted directly by the university. Here is a typical mail:
re Ms Haana Mahdad

The above named student has applied to our Department for admission to a Postgraduate Programme of Study (PhD) and has given your name as someone who can inform me of her ability to undertake advanced study and research leading to a higher degree in Physics.

Would you please let me know, in confidence, your opinion of Ms. Mahdad's ability, character and capacity for postgraduate study.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

If you are applying for a job in a company, then the company might employ an agency to verify that you are who you say are you. These agencies will ask your referee questions such as:

1. When did you last have contact?
 2. Having known *name of candidate* for some time, is there anything that you feel we should know that you would consider detrimental to him/her, or about his/her character?
 3. Do you have any reason to doubt his/her honesty?
 4. If you were looking to fill a vacancy that *name of candidate* had the appropriate experience for, would you employ him/her?
 5. How would you sum up *name of candidate*?
-



Maryam Asadi [1]

I am pleased to have the opportunity to thoroughly recommend Maryam Asadi [for the position of ...] [2]

I am an associate professor at the School of Computer Engineering at the Iran University of Science and Technology. [3]

I was Maryam's supervisor while she was doing her Master's programme in ... She was also a student in my class on Circuit Management. [4]

During her Master's thesis, Maryam demonstrated great intuitiveness in solving ... In fact, she played a major role in ... She also ... [5]

Although Maryam is rather shy and reserved, she works extremely well in teams, both as a team member and team leader. She showed a clear demonstration of these skills when ... [6]

I very much hope that her application will be taken into serious consideration as I am sure that Maryam Asadi represents an excellent candidate. [7]

Best regards [8]

6.4. Structure and template reference letter

The general structure of a reference letter should be similar to the following:

1. Candidate's name in bold, centered
2. Positive opening sentence (*It gives me pleasure to ...*)
3. Referee's position (*I am an associate professor at ...*)
4. Referee's connection to candidate (*I was the candidate's tutor during ...*)
5. Details about candidate's qualifications
6. Reference to candidate's personality
7. Positive conclusion (*I can strongly recommend the candidate ... I very much hope her candidacy will be taken into serious consideration ...*)
8. Salutation (*Best regards*)



Unit 7

Communicating with the Editor





Over my long career as an author a lesson that I have learned, which I would like to pass on to first time authors, is always to be diplomatic with your editor. Editors have a tough job, and it pays to be appreciative of what they do.

Essentially, your main aim is to get your work published as quickly as possible. Anything you can do to smooth this process will help you in this objective. Be diplomatic at all times, even if you are in strong disagreement. Always do everything you can to appreciate, and if possible accommodate, their point of view.

Keith Harding, ELT author and

trainer

The unit highlights the importance of

- the cover letter in affecting the outcome of your paper
- not saying anything negative about the editor and the journal

Look at the email below. Apart from the various mistakes in the English, what other problems can you see?

Subject line: Paper submission

Dear Sir

My name is Omid Rashidi and I submitted my paper to you several months ago and I am still waiting for your judge.

This is the third email I write to know if my paper was admitted or not. Please answer me in any case.

Best regards

A much better version would be

Subject line: Paper submission Manuscript 1453

Dear Dr. Smith,

I was wondering if you had received my email sent 14 September (see below) regarding the submission of my manuscript (1453).

Please find attached a copy of the paper for your convenience.

Best regards

Omid Rashidi

The above is much better because it thinks about the editor's point of view. You provide a meaningful subject line

- the name of the editor



- all the info the editor needs + you save him/her time by attaching another copy of the paper and by incorporating your original email at the end of the current one
- there is absolutely no sense of criticism.

7.1. Writing a bio statement (notes on contributors) for a conference or journal

Some journals and conferences will require you to submit a bio, which is a paragraph about your background and research interests of about 75-100 words. It is written in the third person, meaning that you do not use “I” to describe yourself.

Example 1

Hossein Ahmadi received the B.S. degree in Control and Instrumentation Engineering from Amrkabir University in 2015 and the M.S. degree in EECI from Iran University of Science and Technology. He is currently pursuing the Ph.D. degree at the same university. In 2015, the 3rd TI DSP contest prize was awarded to him. He has been engaged in research and development of control system for flat panel displays and has designed LCD controller for UXGA. His research interests include image processing, VLSI design, 3D display, and flat panel displays.

Example 2

Mahboubeh Taghizadeh is an Assistant professor in TEFL at the Iran University of Science and Technology. She holds a PhD in TEFL from University of Tehran, an MA in TEFL from Iran University of Science and Technology, and a BA in English Language and Literature from Az-Zahra University. She has published in some national and international journals. She has also presented some papers at international conferences. Her current interests include teacher education, computer assisted language learning, and English for academic purposes.



7.1.1. A bio can include

- where you got your previous degrees and what year you graduated.
- which lab you are part of.
- any prizes or awards you have received such as outstanding student conference paper.
- any professional associations you are a member of such as IEEE.
- any poster or conference papers you have presented and at which conference (usually only for graduate student conferences.)
- any other papers you have published (not as common).
- your research interests.

7.2. Ensure your cover email/letter is clear and accurate

Writing a good cover email/letter is crucial in increasing the chances of your paper being published. It will be the first example of your writing skills that the Editor sees. If it is clear and accurate, then the Editor may also make the assumption that your manuscript is equally clear and that your data are accurate.

- Find out the name of the current editor, rather than simply writing *Dear Sir/Madam*.
- Ensure that the journal's name is spelt correctly and is the correct one.
- Provide a brief summary of the aim and outcome of the research (paragraph 2 in the example)
- Outline the key findings and the implications (paragraph 3)
- State why readers of the journal will be interested in your findings and how it fits in with recent articles in the journal (paragraph 4).
- Reassure the editor that his/her journal has an exclusive on your manuscript (paragraph 5)



Below is an example of a good cover letter.

Dear Professor Seinfeld

I would like to submit for publication in the *Journal of Future Education* the attached paper entitled *A Proposal for Radical Educational Reform* by Adrian Wallwork and Anna Southern.

Our aim was to test the efficiency of short vs long degree courses. Our study of 15,000 male and female graduates aged between 35 and 55 found that they would have performed far better in their careers from a financial point of view if they had undertaken a one-year course at university rather than the traditional three- to four- year course.

Our key finding is that people on shorter courses will earn up to 15% more during their lifetime.

The implications of this are not only for the graduates themselves but also for governments as

i) governments could save considerable amounts of money and ii) universities would be free to accept more students.

We believe that our findings will be of great interest to readers of your journal, particularly due to their counterintuitive nature and the fact they go against the general trend that claims that university courses should be increased in length.

This research has not been published before and is not being considered for publication elsewhere.

I look forward to hearing from you.

7.3. If you've only made a few changes, describe them in the letter to the editor

If the reviewer has only asked for minor changes, and if you can describe these changes in around 20 lines or less, then you can incorporate these changes directly into the letter to the editor.



Dear Professor Seinfeld

Please find attached the revised manuscript (No. FE 245.998 Ver 2) by *names of authors*.

Following the reviewers' comments, we have made the following changes: ...

There was only one change (suggested by Ref. 2) that was not made, which was to delete Figure

2. We decided to retain Figure 2 for the following two reasons: ...

I hope you will find the revised manuscript suitable for publication in *name of journal*.

Best regards

If your replies to the reviewers take up more than one page, then they should be written in a separate document. In this case you can write:

Please find attached the revised manuscript (No. FE 245.998 Ver 2) by *names of authors*. Also attached are our responses to the reviewers, including all the changes that have been made.

7.4. Be diplomatic in any emails to check the progress of your manuscript

Dear Dr. Smith,

I wonder if you could help me with a problem.

On April 3 of this year, I resubmitted my manuscript (ID 09-00236.R1), revised according to the Editor's and Referees' comments.

I am just writing to check whether there is any news about the final decision. As you can see from the attached emails below, I have in fact raised this problem twice before.

Anything you could do to speed the process up would be very much appreciated.

Thank you very much in advance.

Best regards



Another example

Subject: Manuscript - #WTF-277

Dear Editor,

Our paper "Is the fact that the English language only has one form of the second person pronoun *you* indicative of more democratic society in Anglo countries?" written by Modou Diop and Haana Diagne, manuscript number WTF-277, was accepted for publication last April 04 (see your email below). However since then we have not received any further information about it. As you will appreciate, we are concerned that there may be some problems in the publication process. The situation is rather urgent for us as we need the volume and page numbers of our paper in order to fill in official budget requests for our institutes.

We look forward to hearing from you.



Unit 8

How to Criticize Constructively





8.1. Structure your email so that the focus is not only on the criticism

Always avoid being negative. Remember that your recipient is only trying to do his/her best, so being impolite or over-critical is not going to help.

A typical situation in the world of academia is when you have to criticize the work, for example, of a fellow colleague, you need to structure your email so that your colleague will react positively despite being criticized.

When someone asks you to have a look at or edit their draft manuscript, they are sharing something with you that may have taken them many months to prepare and which they are probably very sensitive about. Your main aim is to maintain a positive relationship with the person who has asked you to review their work.

Below is a possible eight-part structure.

1) **Begin by showing appreciation.** Try to create a bridge between you and the recipient in which you show that you want to be helpful and cooperative.

- Thank you for sending me the revised version of our paper ...
- I really appreciate being given the chance to ...
- It's good to know that you have solved the issues raised by the referees
- Thanks for sending me your manuscript. It's looking really good, well done!
- I enjoyed reading your paper. It contains a lot of really useful data. I am impressed!

2) **Demonstrate that you are in agreement of the overall aim of what your colleague is trying to achieve.** Show interest in the paper and find areas of the research/manuscript that you are in agreement with.

Your aims seem well grounded and I think there is real innovation.

I think you have highlighted your contribution clearly.

I agree that it is extremely important that we ...

You are absolutely right when you say the focus should be ...



3) Indicate the parts that you like in what your colleague has done

Your methods are really clear and I think readers would have no problem replicating them.

The abstract looks great. Very clear and concise, and not too much introductory stuff.

Your rewritten Conclusions are much clearer now.

The aims of the paper seem so much more focused now.

4) Identify your concerns (this is the part where you introduce your criticisms)

I notice that ...

I am not completely convinced by ...

It seems to me that it might be better if we ...

Please could you clarify for me why you have ...

Make suggestions / Offer to help

5) Tell the authors what you have done.

I have read the manuscript carefully and made several changes to the text, including a couple of additions. I hope that in doing so I have not altered the sense of what you wanted to say. In any case, please feel free to disregard.... Where possible, I have tried to... Nevertheless, I think, the paper still needs some work before you send it to the journal.

6) Make any suggestions in a soft way.

In the past, I have found it useful to ...

The referees might appreciate it if we ...

I think we're nearly there, we just need to ...

I would be very happy to talk through these ideas ...

Let me know if you'd like to Skype some time this week.

7) Offer further help and tell them when you would be available.



If you need any more help, then don't hesitate to contact me. I am on vacation next week, but will be back the week after.

I would be happy to talk through the changes I suggested to the Discussion.

Please keep me up to date with the progress of this manuscript and let me know if you need any further help.

8) End on a positive note

Thanks again for all your hard work on this.

As I said, you've made a substantial improvement to the manuscript. Thank you so much.

8.2. Use the first words set a positive tone

How you write your first sentence will determine how your reader interprets the rest of the email.

It is good practice to say something positive in the first few lines, but be careful how you phrase such comments. For example,

I have looked through your presentation and think it's quite good. Just a few comments:

can be interpreted as being a bit negative. The term *quite good* is a little dangerous in English because it can mean anything from "really good" to "sufficient but nothing great".

Imagine how you would feel if you received the comments in the first column below.

You would probably feel quite discouraged. The comments in the second column immediately put the recipient in the right frame of mind to receive any criticisms that you might have.



not very encouraging	encouraging
Your presentation is OK.	It's looking really good—I love the way you've used photos.
It looks fine.	Overall it looks excellent and the conclusions are very clear.
I looked at your presentation. Here is a list (non-exhaustive) of things you need to change:	I've now had a chance to go through the presentation and I thought you might like a few suggestions.
You need to improve the following points in your presentation:	It's pretty impressive, well done. Here are just a few comments which you are welcome to ignore.

8.3. Be constructive in your criticism

If you need to be critical of someone's work, your recipient is more likely to act on your comments if they are presented in a positive way.

Here is a typical example of an email that fails to address these points in a constructive way:

Dear Paul

I have had a look at the Methods section and there are several problems with it. First you have missed out two crucial steps (i.e., blah and blah). Second, you haven't spelled some of the names of the materials correctly. Last but not least, you have failed to provide the sources of some of the materials.

I am reattaching the draft with various other suggested changes and additions.

Please could you make the other necessary changes and send me the draft back by the end of this week. It is now quite urgent.

Best regards

Maria



8.4. Conclude your report by saying something positive

Your concluding comments should always be positive, thus leaving the recipient thinking that they have not made a complete disaster of their work. Make sure you don't simply end with *Regards, Carlos* but include a phrase like one of the following:

Thanks for doing such a great job on this, and also thanks for offering to do the presentation (I am sure you will do it much better than I would have done).

Well, I think that's all—once again, a really excellent job, just a few things to tighten up here and there.

Hope you find these comments useful, and bear in mind that I've only focused on what changes I believe need making so I'm sorry if it comes across as being very critical.

8.5. Re-read everything before you hit the “send” button

Always re-read what you have written when you have been criticizing someone's work (or whenever you have something potentially awkward to say).

8.6. Be diplomatic when sending reminders

If you are a PhD student or junior researcher and you make a request (e.g., to review your work), your recipient is generally under no obligation to fulfill the request. So if you hear nothing it is a good idea to send them a reminder (known as “chasing” in English). Ensure that you do so in a friendly tone with no sense of frustration or anger. Here are some examples:

I was wondering if you had had time to look at my email dated 10 February (see below).

I know that you are extremely busy, but could you possibly...

Sorry to bother you again, but I urgently need you to answer these questions.

I know you must be very busy but if you could find the time to do this ...

It may help to motivate your recipient to reply if you do one or more of the following:

- empathize with the fact that they are a busy person who probably has more important things to do than to reply to your request



-
- explain why this person is important for you and your work
 - give them a brief explanation as to why you need a reply so urgently
 - tell them how long it will take them to fulfill your request—people always tend to overestimate the time of a task that they don't want to do
 - if time is running short, reduce your original request to what is absolutely essential for you (e.g., maybe originally you asked someone to read your whole manuscript, now you just ask them to read just one section)
 - find a benefit for them of fulfilling your request
 - give them a deadline for their response

Here is an example of an email from a student writing to a professor who she has never met for advice on her manuscript.

Dear Professor Li

I was wondering if you had had time to look at my email dated 10 February (see below).

I imagine that you must receive a lot of requests such as mine, but I really need your input as no one else has your expertise in this particular field. In reality, it would be enough if you could just read the last two pages of the Discussion (pages 12 and 13), just so that you could check that I have not reached any erroneous conclusions. I very much hope that my results might be of interest to you too as they diverge from what you reported in your paper *paper title*. I have a deadline for submission on the 20 April, so it would be perfect if you could get your comments to me by about 10 April.

I realize that this is a lot to ask, particularly as you have never even met me, but if you could spare 10-15 minutes of your time, I would be extremely grateful.

I look forward to hearing from you.



8.7. Be appreciative when thanking someone for doing an informal review of your work

You can begin an email of thanks by saying:

Thank you so much for your review, it was very kind of you to spare the time. The manuscript has certainly benefitted from your input—particularly the Discussion, where you have managed to really highlight the novelty of the research.

If they have made any specific criticisms you can say:

I understand what you meant by... so I have adjusted that section accordingly.

Clearly, having read your comments, I need to rewrite the part about...

I think you were right about the table, so I have...

If you need any clarifications, you can say:

Thanks very much for all this. Just one thing—could you just clarify exactly what you mean by...

I may come back to you if I need further thoughts on some of the slides.

You can conclude your email by something like:

Once again thanks for all your hard work—I found it really useful. I will keep you posted about the progress of the manuscript.



Unit 9

Writing a Peer Review





Peer review is an essential part of research. If you are chosen to do a peer review, it is because you are considered to have specialized knowledge of the subject. Thus, you are in a perfect position to really help, rather than discourage, the authors in their research, even if it means that you ultimately decide that a manuscript is not suitable for publication.

- use a “sandwich” approach, in which your criticisms are sandwiched between positive comments

9.1. Be clear about your role as a reviewer

Your main aims as a reviewer are

1. to assess on behalf of the journal whether or not a paper is suitable for publication
2. help a fellow researcher who may be at the beginning of their career and who may not have access to all the data/equipment/experience/funds that you have

9.2. Read your journal’s review guidelines

Most journals ask you to review a manuscript by following certain criteria. These criteria are normally contained within a form that you are asked to fill in, or may simply be in a downloadable document containing advice on how to write reviews.

Below are some typical aspects that a review is likely to cover

1. contribute to the specific area of knowledge
2. have a relevant title
3. have an abstract that is short yet comprehensive
4. make good use of key words
5. review existing literature and give appropriate references
6. fully describe the research method
7. have a discussion and conclusions
8. be clearly organized and written

9.3. How to structure a referee’s report: (1) acceptance subject to revisions



A referee's report which recommends possible acceptance subject to changes being made could be structured as follows.

1. Summary of paper

This helps the authors to see whether you have understood the essence of their paper, and the editor to understand how relevant the paper is to his / her journal.

Example

The paper deals with ...

The paper gives a good description of ...

This manuscript reports some results on the use of ...

The aim is to assess the quality of ...

This paper has many positive aspects ...

2. General comments on the quality of the paper

This is a good opportunity to say something positive and encouraging about the paper before beginning to make any criticisms). So, mention the strong points of the paper first, and then the weak points.

Example

This paper aims to report the analysis of ... yet the author writes ...

The author needs to clarify the following points ...

Despite the title of the paper, I believe that the paper does not deal with X at all. Specifically ...

The analysis in Section 2 only covers ... Even though these are important parameters, they do not ...

Although the description of X and the samples collected seems to be detailed, accurate, and well documented, the analytical work and the discussion on Y are in need of major revision.



The manuscript does not present any improvement on the analytical procedure already described in the literature; moreover the authors fail to ...

The discussion should be reviewed since it is mainly based on results published in ...

3. Major revisions required

Here you suggest what major changes you think the paper needs in order for it to be publishable in the journal. Again, try to present these changes in a constructive way and help the authors to see why such changes are necessary. Number each comment—this helps the authors when responding and the editors in judging the author's response.

4. Minor revisions required

These generally include typos, changes to numbering, changes to figure legends, suggestions for more appropriate vocabulary, etc. Number each comment.

Example

Abstract: What is the real advantage of the proposed procedure with respect to ...?

page 3 line 12: The word *definite* is misspelled.

page 4: Perhaps Figure 2 could be deleted.

The following information is missing in Section 2:

There seems to be a missing reference in the bibliography.

5. Final comments

Since your aim is to further knowledge in your field through new research, it helps if you offer some encouraging words of advice and to reiterate the positive elements that you have found in the manuscript. This is particularly important for researchers from less developed nations who may not have the equipment and experience that you have access to, but may nevertheless have discovered something that could benefit people living in their area of the world.

9.4. How to structure a referee's report: (2) complete rejection



If you are recommending that a paper be rejected either because it is outside the scope of the journal or because it would require too many revisions, then you would begin with Points 1 and 2 as in above. Even if you are going to recommend rejection, you should still be able to find something positive to say. Points 3 and 4 are not necessary. So finish with Point 5 and if possible make suggestions on what would be required to make the paper more publishable. This will enable the authors to revise their paper and maybe submit it to another (possibly less prestigious) journal.

Example

For the above reasons, I believe that the paper is not innovative enough to be published in ... The paper is not suitable for publication in its present form, since it does not fit the minimum requirements of originality and significance in the field covered by the Journal.

9.5. How to structure a referee's report: (3) acceptance as is

Even if you are recommending a paper for acceptance with no changes, you still need to provide authors and editors with a brief summary (Point 1). If you think the scientific quality is good, but that the English needs some improvement, then ask yourself how much the “poor” English really impacts on the reader's ability to understand.

9.6. Use the sandwich approach: begin and end on a positive note

Your report should always be constructive in its criticism. Your aim is to help, rather than destroy. Always begin your report in a positive way. If you do this, the authors will be more prepared to accept the negative things that you have to say. And always end your report positively.

To help the authors feel more positive about your comments, and thus more likely to implement your recommendations, try not to overuse such nouns as *failure*, *error*, *mistake*, *loss*, *problem*, *inaccuracy*, and *miscalculation*



Given that your aim should be to help rather than destroy the author, try to adopt a soft approach. Here are some ways to write comments that are more likely to be accepted and appreciated by the authors.

By avoiding being too direct, the author is more likely to accept, and understand the need for, the negative feedback.

No	Yes
The whole data set seems to say: “OK, X does not change Y.” Of course! what were you expecting from a one-year experiment? Why bother putting this in the paper at all?	The authors <i>might consider</i> removing this section from the paper as I am not convinced it leads to any worthwhile or conclusive results. Instead, <i>they could</i> focus on the interesting part of their work, which is

Make your comments sound subjective.

No	Yes
It is absolutely wrong to state that $x = y$.	<i>I feel that / As far as I can see, / In my opinion / I believe / Based on my knowledge of the topic I would say that the assertion that $x = y$ may be open to discussion.</i>

If you state that something “must” be done, or that something is “not complete,” try to think of how these problems could be remedied.

No	Yes
The presentation of results must be deeply modified.	<i>I would suggest</i> that the results be presented in a different way; for example, a table could be used rather than a figure. This <i>would make</i> the results stand out better and make it easier for the reader to understand the importance of them.
The description of methods is incomplete and does not permit a correct evaluation of the trials.	The description of the methods needs more details. For example, what criteria were used to select the three byproducts? Why was the field test conducted with KS only? Which parameters did the Authors evaluate in the field test and how?

Try to be helpful and give authors the benefit of the doubt.

No	Yes
The methodological part refers to rather old methods; how can they not be aware of the new procedures existing in the analytical literature?	The authors may not be aware that there are actually some new procedures existing in the analytical literature. They might try reading



There are some qualitative words in English that can be interpreted in more than one way (positively, but often negatively). So be careful of how you use words such as *OK* and *quite*.

If you say *The title is OK* it may be interpreted as “just sufficient but nothing special.” It might be better to say *The title is fine/very appropriate*.

Similarly, *the results are quite interesting* is ambiguous. It could be they are surprisingly interesting, but more likely the interpretation will be that they really state nothing new.

You will thus be potentially increasing knowledge in a particularly area by encouraging the authors to go back and try again.

9.7. Don't just use *should* to make recommendations

When you make recommendations, it is best not to be too strong or too direct, otherwise you may give the impression of being rather authoritarian. Using *must* and *have to* is generally not appropriate (e.g., *the authors must reduce the length of the manuscript*); it is better to use *should*. But to avoid repetition and tedium, you cannot use *should* every time you make a recommendation. Consider using the following alternatives:

The authors should explain X.

Please could you explain X.

I would recommend/suggest that the authors explain X.

It would be advisable to explain X.

It might help the reader if the authors explained X.

Also, in the cases above, you should make it clear why the authors need to explain X. If you don't provide the authors with a motivation, then they may not understand the necessity of explaining X. For example:

Given that an understanding of X is crucial in order to appreciate the quality of the results, I suggest that ...

I am not sure that readers will be able to follow the experimental procedure if they don't first have a clear understanding of X.



9.8. Use separate paragraphs to outline your comments

Divide your comments into sections with headings—these are normally indicated by the journal.

Have separate paragraphs for each point you make. Give clear page and line references to show where your comments refer to in the paper. If possible, number each comment.

Here are some more examples of unhelpful comments because they give no explanations.

The length of the paper could be reduced considerably.

The Discussion is rather poor.

The Conclusions do not add to the overall scientific knowledge in the field.

The format of the tables is inadequate.

The simulation analysis is not convincing.

In each of the above examples, the authors will want to know why the reviewer has made such comments and what they can do to remedy them. For example, how could they reduce the length—by cutting certain sections? by removing figures and tables? by reducing the literature cited? by reducing redundant words and phrases?

9.9. Use *you* to address the authors, and *I* (i.e., the first person) to make reference to yourself

Traditionally, referees address the authors as “the authors.” Given that the referees’ reports are above all for the authors, a much more direct and simpler way to refer to the authors is to say “you.”

The first phrase below, to me at least, sounds very unnatural, and could easily be replaced with the second without any loss of anonymity:

Specifically, this referee is concerned with the following issues ...



Specifically, I am concerned with the following issues ...

The unnaturalness of not using the first person pronoun (I) is also revealed in the following example:

However, *in the reviewer's opinion*, several critical weaknesses (enumerated below) affect the strength of the paper, which *it is believed* should not be accepted for publication.

It is believed presumably means *I believe*.

9.10. Don't make indiscriminate comments about the level of English

If you are certain that there are lots of mistakes, you can say:

This paper needs a thorough revision by a native English proofreader.

If there are only some typing/spelling mistakes:

There are a few typos that need correcting (I suggest the authors turn on the spell check in Word)

If there are just a few grammatical mistakes:

I noticed the following grammatical mistakes [*give a list*] but otherwise the English seems fine.

9.11. Be careful of your own level of English and spelling

If, as a reviewer, you make a comment about the author's English, then you need to be careful about your own too, as it might undermine your credibility.

English need to be corrected by an *english* speaker

The *orgnization* and writing of the paper *need to improve*. There are some grammar errors *need to correct*.

I would *suggest the authors* to have some *native English speaking* to go through it

If the paper is accepted, I strongly recommend *an English prof*-reading.



Unit 10

Writing a Reply to the Reviewers' Reports





- Your objective is ONLY to have your paper published. You should not irritate or insult the referee in any way.
- The tone of your reply may have a big impact on whether your paper is accepted

10.1. Structure your reply to the referees in a way that will keep referees and editors happy

If you want to increase the chances of having your paper accepted for publication, then you might like to try the following four-stage strategy.

First, try to find something about what the referee has said that you can agree with

The referee is certainly right when he/she says that ...

I thank the referee for pointing out that ...

I agree with the referee's comments about ...

We have implemented the referee's useful observations about ...

Second, tell the referee that you have amended something that they mentioned.

Referee 1 suggested providing more complete results. This was a very useful suggestion, so we have now applied the proposed method to a typical industrial application (see the new Section 5).

Third, now that the referee is happy, you can tell him / her why you didn't amend something else.

Given that the paper is intended for a broad audience, we decided not to cut the first two paragraphs of the Introduction.

Fourth, if possible, finish with something else positive about the referee's comments.

We would like to thank the referee once more for sparing the time to write so many detailed and useful comments.



10.2. Present your answers to the reviewers using the clearest possible layout

Deal with each referee's report individually. If the referee has numbered his/her comments and queries, then the simplest solution is to paste in your responses under each comment. For example:

Referee 1

page 4, line 2: there is no clear connection between the two sentences.

The sentences have been clarified as follows: ...

page 5, paragraph 3: this paragraph adds no value, I think it could be deleted

Done.

page 7, last line: What does "intervenes in the process" mean in this context?

We have replaced "intervene in" with "affects the process." NB this line now appears at the top of page 8.

Sometimes referees do not indicate line or page numbers but simply write unreferenced comments in one long paragraph or in a series of paragraphs. If there is just one long paragraph, the best solution is to divide up the paragraph into paragraphs of three to four lines, and then paste your comments directly below each of the resulting sub-paragraphs.

The experimental procedure is not sufficiently informative to allow replication. How was the overall procedure carried out? The author should explain the procedure in detail or cite a reference. Was this procedure applied to the whole sample or just to a part of it? In addition, the instruments for determining X and Y should be reported.

We agree with the referee's comment regarding replication. On page 6 we have inserted a reference to one of our previous papers that contains a detailed description of the total digestion procedure. We have specified that it is applied just to the elutriate. Regarding the two instruments, in the original manuscript we had in fact stated what they were, but in a different section.



So we have now moved these statements to a more logical position in the Materials section (page 5, second paragraph).

A possible structure in both cases—with or without page and line numbering—is thus:

1. Optional: General comments on all the referees' reports but without comments on specific reports.
2. Comments on Referee 1, then comments on Referee 2, then comments on Referee 3.

Where necessary, include old and new line and page numbering to help the referees and editors see where you have made the changes.

3. Final overall comments.

10.3. Call yourselves *we* not *the authors*

Referring to yourselves as “the authors” is not only artificial but creates strange sentences such as:

- *The authors* were pleased that the paper was appreciated. With regard to the referees' concerns about the procedure, *they* have tried to explain it in more detail ...
- *We* were pleased that the paper was appreciated. With regard to the referees' concerns about the procedure, *we* have tried to explain *our* procedure in more detail ...

10.4. Don't be embarrassed to say you don't understand the referee's comments

Sometimes the referee may make some comments that appear to make no sense. In such cases, you can write:

- Unfortunately, we were not able to understand this comment.
- We are not sure what the referee means here.



10.5. Use the present and present perfect to outline the changes you have made

When you tell the editor what changes you have made to your manuscript, you will mainly use three tenses. Use the

- present perfect to describe the changes
- present simple to talk about how the manuscript looks now
- simple past to talk about decisions

- **present perfect to describe the changes**

We have reduced the Abstract to 200 words.

We have given names to each section.

- present simple to talk about how the manuscript looks now

The Abstract is now only 200 words long.

Sections are now referred to by name.

- simple past to talk about decisions

We decided to keep the tables because ...

When you talk about things that you didn't change, you can use either the present perfect or the simple past.

We have kept/kept Figure 1 because ...

10.6. Justify why and where you have not made changes

If you decided not to make a change, then you need to justify your decision.

Remove Table 1 it contains no new information.

We have kept Table 1 as we believe it does contain important information. In fact, in the second column we report the values of ... In addition, the third column shows ... We believe it is important for the reader to see these values in tabular form as they give a very clear visual comparison of the various approaches.



The appendix can be deleted; it serves no purpose other than unnecessarily extending the length of the paper.

Although we agree with the referee that the paper is rather long, we believe that the appendix is vital for those readers who ...

The authors have failed to provide details of the procedure for x.

These details are in fact provided in Ref. 2 (see page 6, line 17); for the sake of space we did not reproduce them in the current manuscript.

10.7. If you disagree with the reviewers, always be diplomatic

I suggest avoiding the use of the verb *disagree* and, if possible, minimize the use of adverbs such as *but*, *although*, *moreover*, *despite this*, *nevertheless*, and *in fact* where such adverbs are used to contradict what the referee has said.

referee's comment	undiplomatic response	diplomatic response
There is a lack of any innovative contribution.	We do not agree at all. Moreover, we have not found any examples of a similar contribution in the literature.	Having read the comment about lack of an innovative contribution, we rechecked the literature and could find no examples of anyone having used this method before. We believe that our work really is innovative for the following reasons:
The results are incomplete.	Incomplete in what sense?	We understand what the referee is saying. We thought that we had covered all aspects, but on the basis of the referee's comment we have added a short case study to indicate the completeness of our results.
The Conclusions are almost the same as the Abstract.	The referee may have a point; however, we have read many other papers published in the Journal, even by native speakers of English, which adopt exactly the same technique.	The referee is right and we have made several changes to ensure that the Conclusions are different from the Abstract, by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · talking about possible Applications · mentioning future work

The last example highlights the fact that if you have made a mistake you should admit it—don't try to justify the unjustifiable!

do what you think is best, but describe what you have done in the most diplomatic way possible so that the editor will be more inclined to accept what you have done.



10.8. If a reviewer finds a limitation in your work, deal with the criticism constructively

For example, a reviewer might write “The authors should consider investigating data on X”.

In your reply to the editor you could write one or more of the following:

- We were unable to access the data on X because such data are not available in the public domain.

We would firstly like to thank all the reviewers for their contribution.

With regard to Reviewer 2's comment about the amount of space we have dedicated to the main topic, where possible we have tried to focus more on the topic. As also recommended by Reviewer 2, we have had the English reviewed by a mother tongue professional.

modify any statements that you make that may be open to interpretation by saying *we believe/we hope/we think/in our opinion* or using conditionals (e.g., *would seem*)

I strongly suggest that when you have written your reply, go through it very carefully and delete any sentences that might offend, even minimally, the referee.

In my previous report I suggested the authors should (i) try to be clear and concise in describing their aims and methods, (ii) present their most important relevant findings through an appropriate selection of significant data, and (iii) ensure that their Discussion and Conclusions reflected the data.

Unfortunately, the authors chose to ignore my suggestions, and consequently their manuscript is not substantially different now from its original version.

10.9. Asking for extension to deadlines

I am writing to ask whether it would be possible to extend the deadline for final submission of our paper until June 14.

The referees asked for several new experiments which will take us an extra two or three weeks to perform.



I apologize for the inconvenience caused by its late submission.

I am writing to inform you that due to unforeseen circumstances, we have to withdraw our paper.

10.10. Enclosing revised manuscript and reply to referees' reports

Attached is the revised version of our paper.

As requested, we have prepared a revised version of our manuscript, which we hope addresses the issues raised by the two reviewers.

As requested, I'm sending you the paper with the changes tracked.

10.11. Saying how your reply to the referees is organized

Below are our responses to the reviewers. The reviewers' comments are in italics, and our responses are numbered.

Rather than going through each report individually, we have organized our response under general areas.

10.12. Making positive comments about the reviewer's comments

Please extend my sincere thanks to the paper reviewers for their helpful comments.

The reviewer's suggestion is certainly helpful and ...

The reviewer is right.

These two comments made us realize that ...

10.13. Outlining changes made

We have improved the paper along the lines suggested by the Referees.

I have considered all the comments and suggestions made by reviewers of this paper, and I have incorporated most of them in the final version of this paper.



10.14. Example

Letter to editor:

Dear Dr. Hillier,

Please find attached the revised manuscript (ID CRST-2019-0091 Ver 2) by *Saba Hosseini and Zahra Amini*. We would firstly like to thank all the reviewers for their contribution.

We have tried to consider all the comments and suggestions made by the reviewers of the journal. I hope you will find the revised manuscript suitable for publication in the Journal of Engineering Education.

Best regards

Letter to reviewers:

Dear Reviewers,

We would firstly like to thank you for your great contribution.

We have prepared a revised version of our manuscript, which we hope addresses the issues raised by the reviewers. We have tried to consider all the comments and suggestions made and below are our responses to your comments. Your comments are in italics, and our responses are numbered.

Reviewer 1

- *More explanation is needed about why academic listening is important in the context of English medium instruction*
 1. We have added some sentences on page 3.
- *There needs to be some explanation of the types of listening tasks being considered here.*
 2. We have mentioned some listening tasks at the beginning of the second paragraph in the Introduction Section.
- *The brief description of the Iranian context is helpful*
 3. A brief description has been written about the Iranian context (Introduction, para 4)
- *The articulation of the research questions, although they are slightly odd research questions, and the authors may wish to consider rewording them.*



4. We agree with the reviewer's comments and have reworded the first and the second research questions.

- *The review of academic listening is quite short for a science education journal such as this one where readers are unlikely to be familiar with the field. It would be helpful if this could be developed to discuss the role of scientific vocabulary.*

5. We have added one paragraph on the role of scientific vocabulary at the end of Academic Listening Section.

- *More explanation is needed of Walqui's strategies.*

6. We have described the six scaffolding strategies suggested by Walqui.

- *More information is needed about the two courses: English for the Students of Engineering and Academic Listening.*

7. We have provided more information about the content of these two books. (Participants Section)

- *It would be helpful if each instrument could be linked to the research question it is intended to answer.*

8. We have linked each instrument to its relevant research question. (Instrument Section)

- *The procedure section seems to be about the development of the instruments rather than the conduct of the study. This needs to be clarified, and I think these 2 sections combined, as it is not always clear how they are connected.*

9. Referee 1 suggested reorganizing the procedure section. This was a very useful suggestion and we have clarified the steps taken for conducting this research, and before that some information is given about the development of the instruments.

- *The section on Design of the Study needs to go at the start of the methodology as this sets the context for the rest of the description.*

10. Done.

- *Page 11 line 8 who suggested this interpretation? The authors, or the source of the IELTS test?*

11. The interpretation of the listening scores is based on the developers of the IELTS test, which was explained in the manuscript.

- *Table 1 - this table seems to combine the categories and the results, but the bottom two rows are not actually labelled. Also, these categories are only about students being able*



to pass English proficiency tests, not examinations in their own degree subject. This needs discussion, as they are not the same.

12. The referee is right and we have separated the table of categories from that of the scores. We have also labeled the columns and rows.
 - *Section 4.2: Surely quite a lot of these could be presented in a table?*
13. A table is added to this section
 - *None of the results so far have considered gender as a factor - given the women are in a minority here as they are in engineering courses in many parts of the world, it would be interesting to know if the authors found any differences between the genders.*
14. With regard to this concern of the reviewer, gender is considered in reporting the students' listening scores on IELTS.
 - *Page 18 line 9 - is this an engineering textbook in English, or an English language learning textbook?*
15. It is the listening textbook, which is specified in the Participants Section.
 - *Discussion: This section needs to use the literature to interrogate the findings, comparing and contrasting what the data says with the findings from previous studies.*
16. Although we agree with the reviewer about expanding the Discussion section, we could not find so many similar studies to our research as most of the studies conducted on listening scaffolding were experimental, while our research is essentially a descriptive study.
 - *One instructor seems to bring the session into students' ZPD and the other doesn't?*
17. One instructor used scaffolding and tried to help students perform the listening tasks through providing scaffolding strategies.
 - *This should then be reflected in the conclusion - currently, this summary of the findings lacks significance.*
18. A sentence emphasizing the significance of the scaffolding is added to the Conclusions section.
 - *It would be helpful if the abstract was formatted according to journal guidelines.*
19. We have formatted the abstract according to journal guidelines.
 - *I am not sure if the references, or tables and figures, are formatted according to the journal guidelines.*



20. On the basis of your comment, we have formatted the references, tables, and the figure according to the journal guidelines.

- *page 8 line 49 should be 'fourth' not 'forth'*

22. We have replaced “forth” with “fourth.”

Reviewer: 2

- *The nature of learning engineering or the specialist vocabulary needed in engineering is not discussed at all.*

21. We have added one paragraph on the scientific vocabulary to the Literature Section

- *Quite a lot of work is needed to develop the literature review*

22. We have described the six scaffolding strategies suggested by Walqui and have added one paragraph on the role of scientific vocabulary.

- *more detail to the methodology.*

23. We have provided more information about the content of the two books used in IUST, we have linked each instrument to its relevant research question, and we have clarified the steps taken for conducting this research.

- *tidy up the results section*

24. The referee is absolutely right and we have separated the table of categories from that of the scores and as recommended we have added three tables to the Results section.

We would like to thank the reviewers once more for sparing the time to write so many detailed and useful comments.

Best regards