

CSC290 Communication Skills for Computer Scientists

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Lecture 9; Mar 11, 2019

Today

- ▶ Writing emails
- ▶ Email introductions

Midterm

Average

- ▶ Individual: 59%
- ▶ Group: 74%
- ▶ Combined: $.85 * 59\% + .15 * 74\% = \mathbf{61\%}$

Remark Requests

- ▶ Submit a remark request **on MarkUs**.
- ▶ Explain the exact issue with the grading.
- ▶ Your entire test will be re-graded, so your grade can go either up or down.

Deadline: one week from today (March 18)

Solutions

Solutions to the multiple choice questions are posted.

The multiple choice and test booklets themselves will not be posted, but I have extra hard copies in my office.

Emails

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- ▶ you sent 3-4 emails just to schedule an appointment.

“But I already know how to write an email”

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- ▶ you sent 3-4 emails just to schedule an appointment.
- ▶ you received an email, but have no idea why the sender sent the email to you.

“But I already know how to write an email”

Raise your hand if you experienced a situation where . . .

- ▶ you asked a person 3 questions in an email, and they only answered the last one.
- ▶ you sent 3-4 emails just to schedule an appointment.
- ▶ you received an email, but have no idea why the sender sent the email to you.
- ▶ you didn't get a response for your email.

Today

How to write effective emails that are easy to respond to.

Bias

Much of what I learned about emails are from my time in a startup accelerator.

Some of the content of this lecture is obvious, but many things are not obvious (at least they weren't to me).

Investors, CEOs, and other senior people are very busy. How do you make sure your emails are seen?

Email

Advantage:

- ▶ Easy and ubiquitous
- ▶ Inexpensive
- ▶ Scalable (share information to many people easily)

Disadvantage:

- ▶ High volume of spam and junk mail
- ▶ Cannot read non-verbal cues
- ▶ Not secure

Keep the audience in mind

- ▶ Are they busy people?
- ▶ Do they know you? (Is this a “cold” email?)
- ▶ Are they expecting this email?
- ▶ When will they be seeing your email?
- ▶ How often do they check email?
- ▶ Did they express their email preference to you?

Worksheet

Work with a partner

The anatomy of an email

- ▶ To
- ▶ CC
- ▶ BCC
- ▶ Subject
- ▶ Body

What is the difference between “To”, “CC” and “BCC”?

To, CC, vs BCC

- ▶ **TO**: the main recipient of the email
- ▶ **CC** (carbon copy): other people who may be interested in the message
- ▶ **BCC** (blind carbon copy): send a copy of the email to someone, *without* any other recipient's knowlegde.

What are appropriate uses of **BCC**?

To, CC, vs BCC

- ▶ **TO**: the main recipient of the email
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What are appropriate uses of **BCC**?

- ▶ Sending an email to a mailing list
 - ▶ keep all recipient's emails private
- ▶ Removing someone from a thread so they don't receive further replies
 - ▶ e.g. "Moving [name] to BCC to save their inbox"

Reply vs Reply-all

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- ▶ **Reply-all:** email response goes to both the *sender*, and any other recipients (but not people in the BCC field)

When should you *reply* vs *reply-all*?

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When should you *reply* vs *reply-all*?

- ▶ **Reply:** when there is a long list of recipients.
- ▶ **Reply-all:** to keep everyone in the loop.

Subject

The subject should concisely describe the content of the email.

- ▶ The subject should help the recipient decide:
 - ▶ Do I need to open this email?
 - ▶ Do I need to do something?
 - ▶ Do I need to reply to this email?

Subject-only emails

- ▶ Sometimes, people send emails with only a subject and no body.
- ▶ Succinct message, followed by “EOM” (End of Message).
- ▶ This is ok for short announcements, but *not* recommend for an email that requires a response.

Other email acrynoms and labels

- ▶ FYI - For Your Information
- ▶ OOO - Out Of Office
- ▶ REQ - request
- ▶ Action Required
- ▶ Urgent (use with care)

Subject: Good or bad?

- ▶ Meeting

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- ▶ PASS Process Meeting [Feb 25th 10am]

Subject: Good or bad?

- ▶ Meeting
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- ▶ Could you send the February expense report? EOM

Subject: Good or bad?

- ▶ Meeting
- ▶ PASS Process Meeting [Feb 25th 10am]
- ▶ Could you send the February expense report? EOM
- ▶ Tuesday Meeting delayed

Choosing an email subject (Worksheet)

What subject should Gabrille choose for his email?

Content

- ▶ Address the reader
- ▶ Get to the point
- ▶ Use paragraphs effectively
- ▶ Call-to-action
- ▶ Signature block

Addressing the reader

Examples:

- ▶ Dear Miss Rose
- ▶ Dear Mohammed
- ▶ Hi Emma
- ▶ Hello Joe

In long threads, people sometimes forgo greeting. But usually not in a first email unless you know the person well.

In CS, normally address people by first name.

Get to the point

- ▶ Business emails should be informative and brief.
- ▶ Answer the question “why are you sending an email?” quickly.

Starting the email (Worksheet)

What subject should Gabrielle choose?

Email Content

- ▶ Use paragraphs and topic sentences so your email is easy to skim.
- ▶ Keep it brief as much as possible.
- ▶ Use lists if necessary.
- ▶ Place long “attachments” at the end.

Content (Worksheet)

How can Gabrielle use paragraphs?

What content should Gabrielle exclude?

End with a call-to-action

- ▶ What do you want the recipient to do after reading your email?
- ▶ Now that they are done, remind them!

Your call-to-action should be **specific**.

Good call-to-action? (Worksheet)

What call-to-action should Gabrielle choose?

Effective call-to-action

How can you use an effective call-to-action in this scenario?

- ▶ you are asking a person 3 questions in an email, and want answers to them all

Effective call-to-action

How can you use an effective call-to-action in this scenario?

- ▶ you are asking a person 3 questions in an email, and want answers to them all

Solution:

- ▶ Write your questions as a numbered list
- ▶ Your call-to-action should be a request to answer **all** the questions

Signature Block

- ▶ Keep it simple.
- ▶ Some companies have common signature blocks.
- ▶ Refrain from adding quotes, cute images, anything not absolutely required.

Is this signature block good?

Subject: Today's Meeting

Hey Allison!

I am looking forward to seeing you today for our meeting. I've attached the materials needed for our discussion. Let me know if you have any questions.

Regards,

Tricia Marcus

Marketer Extraordinaire

hotpartychick@triciamarketing.com

(555) 545-5656

"Be so good they can't ignore you." - Steve Martin

Other considerations:

- ▶ **Length of your email:**
 - ▶ Are you getting to the point?
 - ▶ Can you move content into an attachment?
- ▶ **Timing of your email:**
 - ▶ People go read emails reverse chronologically
- ▶ **Proper English:**
 - ▶ Are you using proper English, avoiding slang?
- ▶ **Tone of your email:**
 - ▶ Do you sound angry?

Check the tone

It is very easy for people to misunderstand the tone of emails.

Example:

Emma,

I need your report by 5 p.m. today or I'll miss my deadline.

Ted

Does Ted sound angry?

Alternative

Hi Emma,

Thanks for all your hard work on that report. Could you please get your version over to me by 5 pm, so I don't miss my deadline?

Ted

Emoticons in emails (study)

Emoticons in workplace emails provide contextualized cues about how an utterance is supposed to be interpreted. They function as

1. Markers for positive attitude,
2. Markers for jokes and irony,
3. Hedges, to strengthen thanks and soften requests.

– Skovholt et al. The Communicative Functions of Emoticons in Workplace E-Mails

Acceptability of emoticons depends on your workplace.

What's wrong with this email?

Subject: Some points to discuss

Hey people,

We were thinking of changing a few things around the office. These things have bothered most of us and the management thinks it is time we take notice of these aspects. I know that we are all real busy but we should speak about these points in our next meeting. Also, many have not yet submitted the reports and the deadline is coming up in the next couple of days. So, make sure we all concentrate.

Thanks, Benny Markos.

One Topic per Email

Write **two separate emails** for two separate issues.

Worksheet Page 2

- ▶ Work with a partner

Email Introductions

- ▶ People don't respond as readily to cold emails.
- ▶ Having a mutual friend to introduce you will increase response likelihood.
- ▶ Introductions are useful for:
 - ▶ finding mentors
 - ▶ finding jobs
 - ▶ networking

Introduction Etiquette

- ▶ Ask for **specific** introductions.
- ▶ Your mutual friend might want to ask permission before doing the introduction. You can help by writing a blurb explaining who you are, and why you are interested in the introduction.
- ▶ Try to respond to the introduction quickly.
- ▶ Announce that you are moving your mutual friend to “BCC”.

Real Introduction Email

Hi Jane,

As I was saying this morning, my friend Danny is a PM at Company and looking for someone to spearhead a bunch of data science projects. You're one of the best data scientists I know so I quickly thought of you!

I'll let you two take it from here.

Email Meeting Requests

Hi Sam,

I'm a UTM student interested in a computer science career. In fact I'm looking for a summer internship right now, and chanced upon your profile on LinkedIn. I was very impressed with what you've done, and was wondering whether you have time to give me some advice over coffee, about how to become a successful software developer.

What time are you available?

Thanks, Jesse

Setting up a Meeting

- ▶ Minimize the effort of the responder.
- ▶ “What time are you available?” is a time-consuming question to answer.
- ▶ Better:
 - ▶ Are you available Tuesday afternoon, say at 3pm?
 - ▶ I can be around next week Tuesday 2pm or Thursday any time.
- ▶ You can always ask the recipient to suggest another time.

Specific Requests

Hi Sam,

I'm a UTM student interested in a computer science career. In fact I'm looking for a summer internship right now, and chanced upon your profile on LinkedIn. I was very impressed with your work at ABC Co. Do you know if your company would be open to hiring summer interns?

Thanks, Jesse

People are Generally Helpful

- ▶ Not everyone will respond to cold emails like this.
- ▶ However, people in CS tend to be *very helpful*, and very open to helping newcomers.
- ▶ So **think** about how people can help you, and **ask** for help!

It's okay if some people don't respond.

Cold Emails

Subject: Coffee Chat

Hi Lisa,

My name is Matt. I'm currently finishing up my undergrad and I'm a data science intern at BigCo. I'm interested in hearing about your research in hopes of understanding the data cycle that goes on at your research group and potentially pinpoint an exact problem that I can help solve with my project. Would you be interested to meet for a quick chat and coffee sometime in the next week?

Sincerely, Matt

Next “Blog Post”

- ▶ Not really a blog post.
- ▶ Identify a potential mentor, someone that can help you in some way.
 - ▶ A person working for a company you are looking to join.
 - ▶ An alumnus who is successful.
 - ▶ A graduate student working at a lab you want to join.
- ▶ Write an email to ask them questions, or set up a coffee meeting.

I highly encourage you to actually send the email, to see where it takes you. You may find a job this way.

Avoid asking famous people. Find someone who is local, possibly an alumnus or someone else with a local connection. They are more likely to respond to you.