

Your class grade could ride on your e-mail to your professor

Q: You could assist an entire profession if you would advise undergraduates on how to compose e-mail messages to their professors.



Like my colleagues, I've received peremptory messages from undergraduates, even entering freshmen, the tone of which might have been used by

an aristocrat to a particularly lax and unpleasant waiter. After the remonstrances, there's often a transparent attempt at manipulation, as in "Have a great weekend!" or "Thanks in advance for your understanding."

I want to be available to my students, but I don't want to be addressed as if I were their employee. Can you give them some suggestions?

A: Certainly. Miss Manners regrets that Deportment is no longer graded. Here is what a polite student would write:

"Dear Professor Wise,

"I regret that because of a tragedy in my family, I must ask you for an extension on the paper that is due on Friday. My beloved grandmother has died, and my presence has been urgently requested in Aspen, not only to attend her funeral but to deal with matters concerning her estate. I expect to be able to return here within two weeks, and could certainly deliver the paper before Thanksgiving break or, so as not to burden you with it during the holiday, soon after.

"Let me say what a privilege it is to hear your lectures and how much I hate to have to miss even one of them. Please accept my apologies for this regrettable absence.

"Yours sincerely,

"Luke Loggle

"P.S. I don't want to impose on you with my family troubles, but you should know that this is not the same grandmother who passed away at Stowe earlier in the semester. Owing to my parents' remarriages, I am blessed with several."