

How to Write an Email to a Potential Research Mentor

For most professors, the best way to contact them is by e-mail. Professors get many emails from students looking to join their labs. You want to make sure that your email is personalized and succinct. Impersonal emails that are not addressed to an individual person and that do not describe specifics **will be deleted**. Make your email stand out as coming from someone who is willing to put in the time and genuinely interested in the topic. We suggest you include the following:

1. Information to include in an email to a potential research mentor:

- a. A specific and direct subject line
- b. Your first and last name
- c. Your major and year (freshman, sophomore, etc)
- d. Your career goals (if known)
- e. WHY you are interested in doing research in that SPECIFIC lab (what is your specific connection, what do you already know about the topic, what are hoping to discover?)
- f. Your availability – both hours/week during the term of interest, summer, and continuing years (I am a junior and hoping to continue developing a research project through my graduation in May of 2022)
- g. Whether you are looking for a paid, work-study, or for credit position***
- h. Any previous research experience
- i. An attached resume (or be sure to say that you can send if requested)
- j. Request a meeting with the professor to talk about the possibility of working in the lab
- k. Your contact info (phone number and/or email)

** Note: Professors can get flooded with requests for research positions**

- If you do not hear back from one particular lab, do not be discouraged
- We recommend that you start by contacting 6-8 labs to increase your chances of matching
- Plan ahead: If you would like to start research in the fall semester, do not wait until the fall to contact professors; instead, start making contacts in the spring or summer for these positions.

2. Sample Emails to Professors...Ugly, Bad, and Good Examples!

a) THE UGLY:

Subject: <no subject>

Hey,

I am interested in working in UR lab. Plz send me more info about this. Or, can meet u tomorrow between 10-11am. I really need this so I can apply to my graduate program.

Channing (I have a last name but why should I tell you?)

b) THE BAD:

Subject: research

Dear Dr. Oz,

I am interested in working in your lab. I am a sophomore Biological Sciences major who is excited to get involved in research. As a future doctor, I realize that learning how to do research is an essential step to understanding how diseases work. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you,
Channing Tatum

c) THE GOOD:

Subject: = Inquiry: undergrad research for XX Term – your last name

Dear Dr. Oz,

My name is Channing Tatum and I am writing to inquire about possible research opportunities in your lab. I am a sophomore Biological Sciences major and am considering a career in XXXX. This will be my first research experience and I am excited to learn how to conduct experiments and analyze results.

I am very interested in your research on <cell death> because I want to conduct research on cancer and be an oncologist. After reading your paper on programmed cell death in yeast strains, I learned about some of the molecular techniques you are using to study these processes of cells. I believe that working in your lab will provide me with a strong foundation in techniques commonly used in cancer research [this should be your OWN words, not copy-pasted from their research description or this sample!] and further build my scientific thinking skills.

I am a hard worker, having worked throughout high school and college, I love to learn, [customize to show your specific EVIDENCE that you are a hard worker, or learn quickly or whatever, or don't write this] and am willing to start out in your lab at any level. I have attached my resume that further outlines my previous experiences and skills that will be applicable to this position.

I will be available to work XX hours per week in the XX term (**add** how many terms you will be available). With your support, I can work in your lab for academic credit.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my email. I would very much like to discuss your research further and the possibility of joining your research group. Is there a convenient time for you to meet over zoom? I can be reached via email (pitt@pitt.edu) or at 412-555-5309. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you again,
Channing Tatum