

Tips and Tricks on How to Craft the Best E-mail When Looking for a Research Position

It's often challenging — and sometimes intimidating, — to make first contact with a faculty member when you are trying to get a position in a lab.

Below are some tips about how to structure your first email to make the best possible first impression and increase your chances of getting an answer back.

1. Make sure your email adheres to elementary email etiquette. An email is not a text: it is a professional communication and should reflect this. Make sure to include salutations, closings, and a signature, including your B00#. Similarly, double check the spelling and grammar before hitting “send”. Click here to hear more about email etiquette expected at Dal: <https://www.dal.ca/faculty/health/health-sciences/about/professionalism.html>

2. Take the time to personalize the email to your recipient. When looking for a research position, it is normal to contact many faculty members. However, each email should contain some elements that are specific to the faculty member receiving the email. First, make sure to address them by their names (e.g., Dear Dr. Smith). Second, include at least one sentence to tell the researcher why you are contacting them. (e.g., Last year, I took PHYL XXXX with you as an instructor and the unit on neurophysiology fascinated me and sparked my curiosity. Therefore, I'm looking to deepen my knowledge of brain functions and processes and I know your lab has a strong research program in these areas). The areas of interests of each faculty members in physiology and biophysics can be found here: <https://medicine.dal.ca/departments/department-sites/physiology/our-people.html>

3. Send a transcript and your résumé. Most faculty members are busy and receive numerous emails daily. Make their lives easier by sending an unofficial transcript and your résumé, so they don't have to ask for it!

4. State honestly what you are looking for. Be clear (and honest!) about the type of position you are looking for and when. For instance, are you looking for a volunteer position, a summer studentship, an honours project, etc.? When would this experience take place? (E.g., I am currently looking for a summer research student position for May-August 2021).

5. Keep it short. Your email is more likely to have the intended impact if it's kept to 1-2 focused paragraphs rather than a long-winded essay-type email.

6. Feel free to send a follow-up email after 1-2 weeks. One follow-up email is appropriate if you haven't heard back from faculty members within 1-2 weeks. It shows your interest and your seriousness. However, please wait at least a week before sending a follow-up as researchers are busy and may take a few days to get to your email. If, after one follow-up email, you still haven't heard back, it's safe to assume you should focus your search on other supervisors.



Know that the large majority of faculty are thrilled that undergraduate students are interested in their research and are more than willing to help you achieve that goal. However, the number of positions in a lab is always limited, so starting to contact potential supervisors early may help you secure that coveted position.

Best of luck in your quest to find a research position in physiology & biophysics!