

Clear, positive communication with staff.

Whether communicating with UNE staff in person, by phone, email, or online, keep in mind the following tips for clear, positive communication. Also refer to the Cyberethics@UNE guidelines at <http://policies.une.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00067> for specific tips about online communication.

- If you wish to see someone in person, consider ringing or emailing first to arrange a suitable time to meet – particularly if they have variable work hours – rather than taking your chances on the person being in their office. Bear in mind that trying to arrange an appointment via email could mean a few emails back and forth. If phoning, leave a clear, unrushed voice message with your name, contact number, time and date of call. Take note of information in your unit guide about when unit coordinators or other staff are available for consultations and how they prefer you to contact them. Some staff are, for example, only available in the mornings. When you plan to see someone in person, knock on their door rather than just walk in to their office. If there is a reception area, that is the place to go to first. If an appointment has not been made, ask if it is convenient to speak with the person there and then. If not, negotiate a mutually convenient time.
- Make your reason for seeking an appointment and your queries clear and succinct. For example, if relevant, briefly state steps you have already taken to try and answer a query. If staff know you have been proactive about trying to solve a problem, they are often more receptive to assisting you. This is because it can sometimes be frustrating to give out information readily available to students. If emailing, keep it brief as a long email is likely to be looked at last. “Less is more”.
- Aim for formal communication – especially in the written form. Sometimes students have used sms or text style language in emails and online postings to staff. This is not appropriate in a university context. Your communications should be professional yet friendly. For example, when communicating with academic staff for the first time, address them by their title unless you have been told to do otherwise. Some staff are happy to be addressed by their first name; others are not. Many staff, for example, don’t appreciate being addressed simply as “Hey!” at the start of an email.
- Give your full name, student number, and relevant course or unit details in communications where possible. Staff respond to hundreds of students and don’t necessarily know who you are. Also, signing off emails with “Thx” and no other details such as your name means you’re less likely to get a reply. Also have a clear subject heading in your emails.
- If emailing, always use your myune email address. If you email via a hotmail, gmail, or another account, it could be mistaken as junk or spam and not be responded to. A private email address such as playbunny@.... or raunchyman@... is also inappropriate for formal communications. UNE also has a policy whereby all communications to students will be to their myune email address. You may wish to divert UNE emails to another email account, but when replying to emails, make sure you send from your @myune.edu.au address. Also note the onus is on you to manage where you divert your UNE emails to and who sees those emails. Also, when you started at UNE, if you gave UNE several email addresses to reach you by, let UNE know of addresses no longer active or that you no longer want information to go to.
- Be sure to read your emails from UNE. It can be frustrating to receive so many UNE emails. However, if something has been emailed which you did not read, it can also be frustrating for staff to respond to queries already answered in such emails. The onus is on you to read official communications from UNE to your @myune.edu.au address. Be sure to also read postings in your online Moodle units – especially those relating to class times, venues, unit coordinator availability, assessments, due dates, etc.

- Avoid abbreviations or text language in written communications. Don't assume staff know what abbreviations mean. A staff member once received an email from a student that ended with "LOL". He thought it meant "Lots of love" and got very nervous!! Even if a staff member knows it means "Laugh out loud", it is not the formal language expected in communications to University staff. Also, use capital letters at the beginning of your sentences and full stops at the end – even when posting messages onto UNE Facebook sites. Without punctuation, some communications can look like a random string of words and are not what is expected at the tertiary level.
- While capital letters at the start of sentences and proper nouns are warranted, avoid Caps Lock – i.e. when you type IN CAPITAL LETTERS TO EMPHASISE A POINT, THIS CAN BE PERCEIVED AS THE WRITTEN EQUIVALENT OF SHOUTING AT A PERSON!
- Maintain a calm or neutral tone in written or verbal communications. While you might feel strongly about an issue, if you resort to swearing, name calling, or adopt a hostile tone, the issue you are trying to raise can get lost. If you adopt a manipulative, and/or overly familiar tone, this can also distract from the issue. Rather than the "problem" being the "problem", you might end up being seen as the "problem" – and your needs are less likely to be heard and met. This sort of situation can then leave you feeling more frustrated. If you are writing something while angry or upset, look at it again when you have had a chance to feel calmer. Take out emotionally laden language, sarcasm, or blaming. Focus on issues (When issue x happened, I felt/thought y, and what I need is z) rather than attacking individuals.
- When approaching staff about something you want to see happen, avoid demanding or telling the staff member what he or she must do. Rather than "You must..." or "UNE should..." language, try stating what you need in terms of "I am seeking..." or "I am requesting the following due to..." Adopt a courteous, respectful tone. Say things like "Your consideration of this matter is much appreciated" or "Thanking you in advance for looking into this". Conveying genuine appreciation in your communications can go a long way.
- When making requests, be polite but not overly grateful, apologetic, meek, or passive. Avoid saying things like "If you can get back to me..." or "Hope to hear from you..." as this gives the other person a potential out, or invitation not to contact you. Be clear and direct such as "Look forward to your response".
- Where relevant, show understanding or appreciation of a staff member's perspective or situation. Hopefully, he or she can then see where you are coming from too. For example, if you have been waiting on a reply for some time, you might say "While I appreciate this is a very busy time for you, I would welcome a reply by...."
- The above said, do allow a reasonable time frame for a reply. While you might be used to instant messaging, or quick replies via social media, it may take a few days to get a response from staff; particularly if you emailed on a weekend and depending on your enquiry. If worried whether an email has been received, set up your emails so the receiver sends acknowledgment of receipt of your email. If you do not get a reply in the timeframe hoped for, send a polite reminder email/phone call, etc. Avoid, where possible, sending your same query to another staff member, or several staff members at once or in quick succession. While you might think your problem will be solved faster, this "scattergun" approach often leads to confusion and ill feeling; especially if staff unable to answer your question have been approached and if several people are looking into the same thing.

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- There may be times where you feel you're being passed around from one staff member to another. This can be frustrating. However, when this happens it is to ensure your matter is responded to by the right person. Sometimes this can take a while to figure out, so your patience is very much appreciated. Most staff appreciate that you, as a student, don't know what you don't know – and that you might end up asking the “wrong” area for information. Their role is to steer you in the right direction with the same courtesy and respect that they expect from you.
- Be mindful of communication procedures within your School and Faculty at UNE. For example, students seeking extensions for assignments in some Schools must submit extension requests via an administration email. In other Schools requests can go direct to unit coordinators.
- If you are seeking an extension, submit your request in a timely manner **before** due dates. If you make a request after a due date has passed, you could be in breach of School extension/submission policies. More guidelines on seeking extensions, “specials” and academic appeals can be found at <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/student-support/counselling/tip-sheets>
- When communicating with Student Central at UNE, communicate via [AskUNE](#) where possible; as there is a record of your contacts which protects you and the University. Use the [AskUNE](#) search feature to find answers to common questions.
- If you have a concern, grievance or complaint to communicate, in the first instance approach the area or person that the matter relates to. The matter could be resolved informally. If you still have concerns, you can submit feedback (positive or negative), or a formal complaint to UNE's Student Grievance Unit via their online form found at this link: <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/my-course/managing-my-course/complaints-compliments-and-feedback>
- When lodging a complaint, where possible, state what you would like to see happen – again you can use the “When issue x happened, I felt/thought y, and what I need is x”. There is no guarantee that what you want to see happen will happen, however, you are demonstrating an attitude of working towards a solution. All complaints are treated seriously and confidentially.
- If seeing someone in person about a grievance or matter that could bring up emotions for you, allow time to calm yourself. Use a “centering” breath technique. Firmly plant feet on the ground. Bring attention inwards. Relax your chest, stomach and abdomen and allow your breath to sink down to your abdomen, just below your navel, deep inside your pelvis or center of your body. Your stomach will rise as you breathe in, and relax as you exhale. Focus energy to your center as you communicate - to feel “grounded” and steadier. Notify the person you are meeting with if you wish to bring a support person along.
- Notice your body language. Stand tall rather than slouch. Maintain good eye contact rather than look down. Speak clearly rather than mumble or eat your words. Maintain an even verbal tone, rather than speak loudly/softly, quickly/slowly. Aim for a steady voice and breath, confident posture, and clear, direct, yet courteous and respectful communication. Be assertive rather than aggressive or passive. Don't talk over staff and allow each other to finish what each is saying.

For further communication tips, contact UNE Student Counselling and Psychological Services for a free appointment - (02) 6773 2897.

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