

Developing EFL learners' email literacy: A focus on requests to faculty during academic cyber-consultations

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What do students call you? Professor, Ms., Mrs., Mr., Dr., Sir?



Update 05 June 2015:

You probably arrived to this page from a search trying to find out what to call your university instructor. Here is the answer to your question:

You should use “Dr.”

There’s a good chance you got here because you were searching to find out what to call your professor if she is a woman. The answer to that question is:

Call your female professors what you call your male professors. You should refer to your university instructor as “Doctor.” (You can also call her Professor, in the United States).

“Doctor” and “Professor” are gender-neutral terms. They work equally well for women and men. We are all professors and our gender is not relevant.

If you are worried because you aren’t positive if your professor has a Ph.D., then you can just use “Professor” in the United States, but nobody will be insulted if you just call your professor “Doctor,” and you wouldn’t be violating some secret code of conduct by calling your professor Doctor.

<http://smallpondscience.com/2013/05/21/what-do-students-call-you-professor-ms-mrs-mr-dr-sir/>

“DOCTOR”? “INSTRUCTOR”? “PROFESSOR STAFF”? COLLEGE STUDENTS DON’T KNOW WHAT TO CALL TEACHERS ANYMORE.

Illustration by Alex Eben

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hat are you supposed to call a professor? Her first name? “Professor”? “Mrs.” or “Ms.”? “Doctor”? Or, my students’ perennial favorite email honorific, “Hi”? The **complexity** of this **answer**—the **innumerable** rules for **who** gets called **what** in the **modern** university—**will** astound **you**.



REBECCA SCHUMAN

Rebecca Schuman is an education columnist for *Slate*.



Katrina Gulliver, a professor at the University of New South Wales, is in the midst of what she calls an “epidemic” of familiarity—indeed, her Australian students seem “surprised” she has a last name at all. She explains in *Inside Higher Ed*: “I’ve tried joking about it when students use my first name in class, or writing in emails that I do not do first names with undergrads.” But, she

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/education/2014/03/what_should_students_call_their_college_professors.html

How to Email a Research Professor

Your email should:

- have an informative subject line
- be concise
- be formal: Dear Dr. Smith; Sincerely, Your Name
- not use Mrs. or Ms.
- NOT have slang, abbreviations, or emoticons
- if applying for an opening:
 - address any qualifications the professor is looking for
 - demonstrate your experience
- if asking for a research opportunity:
 - state specifically your interest in that research group (you need to read the professor's website)
 - explain why research is important for your goals
 - ask to schedule a meeting or say that you will be coming to office hours

DO NOT SEND THIS EMAIL

Generalized from an email to a UCSC Professor

Netiquette Guidelines

How to E-mail Your Professor

Students often tell us that they worry about how to address an e-mail message to a professor – especially one whom they don't know. Below are suggestions that answer concerns we've heard not just from students, but from professors. And note: use these tips not just for e-mailing professors, but people who work in college offices, your employers and job supervisors, and your class deans and RDs.

On addressing your professor

E-mail to a professor should be treated like a business letter – at least until you know that professor's personal preferences very well. Although e-mail is widely regarded as an informal medium, it is in fact used for business purposes in many settings (including Wellesley

- > **Netiquette intro**
- > **Why Netiquette?**
- > **Basic Guidelines**
- > **Some Posts to Ponder**
- > **A Brief History of Community**
- > **Going Outside: Facebook & Other Sites**
- > **How to E-mail Your Professor**
- > **Links, Help, and More**
- > **Internet Jargon and Abbreviations**
- > **WCPSC home**
- > **Wellesley College home**

- o <http://web.wellesley.edu/SocialComputing/Netiquette/netiquetteprofessor.html>

Background

- shift in the medium of student-faculty interaction toward more ‘cyber-consultations’
- hybridity of the email medium affording great stylistic variations & presenting challenges to L2 learners who are unfamiliar with email etiquette in the TL
- absence of explicit instruction of email writing in most academic syllabi

Research questions

- To what extent does explicit pragmatics instruction improve students' ability to write pragmatically appropriate email requests to professors?
- In what aspects (if any) is the improvement evident?

Instructional plan

- 43 EFL intermediate-level students (all female) were assigned into control and treatment group (control, N=20; Treatment, N=23)
- Treatment group received 6-hour meta-pragmatic instruction (over 4 weeks) of email requests to professors in three scenarios varying in imposition levels and received explicit corrective feedback on writing practice
- Control group went through normal syllabus

Strategies	Appointment	Feedback	Extension
Direct	<i>I would like to meet with you/ set up an appointment with you</i>	(Please) <i>let me know what you think/ if you have any comments/ suggestions.</i>	
Conventionally indirect	<p><i>Could I meet with you/ make an appointment to see/ meet with you</i></p> <p><i>I was wondering if I could make an appointment with you/ come by and see you</i></p>	<p><i>Could you please take a look/ look over (attachment) (and give/ help/ guide me with some feedback)?</i></p>	<p><i>Would it be a problem if I turned it (assignment) in on ...</i></p> <p><i>I was wondering if it would be possible for me to submit/ turn in ...</i></p>
Softeners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Show consideration for the teacher <i>“if you are busy”</i> <i>“if you feel that this notice is too short”</i> - Give the teacher enough time (avoid phrases such as <i>“I need your advice immediately”</i>) - Tone: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘Short and sweet’ → efficient Longer with greetings and updates → friendly, pleasant, less business-like <p>Some of the phrases that help to grease social relationship: <i>“I’m enjoying the class immensely!”</i> <i>“I hope you enjoyed your New Year break”</i></p>		

Assessment instruments

- a discourse completion task comprising three request scenarios were used for data collection
- the scenarios were counterbalanced for the pre-test that was conducted at the study's onset, and the two post-tests that were conducted at the end of the study and 4 weeks after

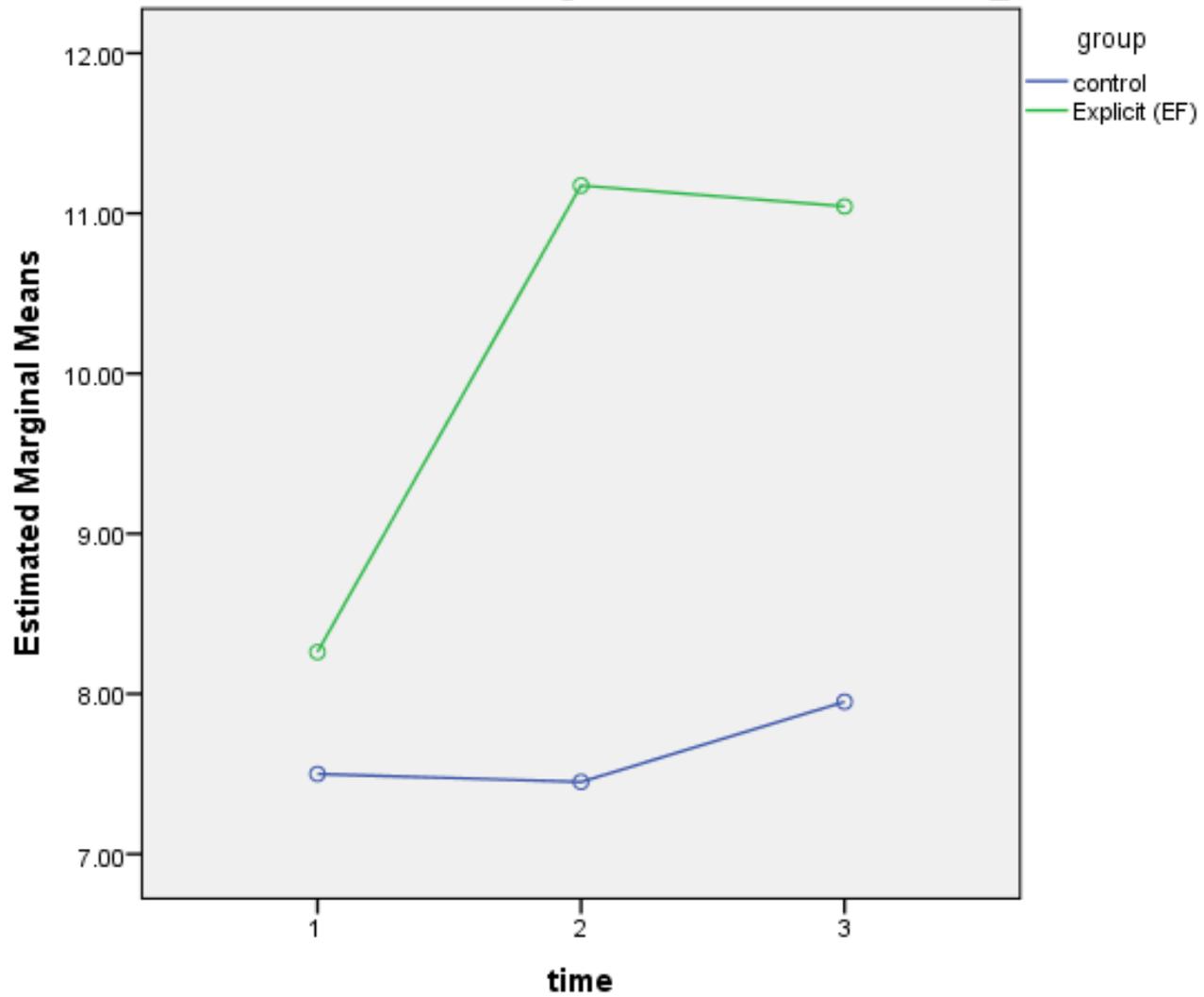
Data analysis

- a defined five-point rating scale was used to grade the collected emails, with 5 being the highest (appropriate) and 1 the lowest (completely inappropriate).
- grading was based on 4 aspects: (1) achievement of communicative goals, (2) appropriate register in the given context of P, D and R, (3) coherent discourse, and (4) accurate language usage, with heavier weighting assigned to appropriateness than accuracy.
- request strategies (direct vs. indirect) and framing moves (address forms, openings and closings) were also compared in pre- and post-test performance

Results: Research Question 1

To what extent does explicit pragmatics instruction improve students' ability to write pragmatically appropriate email requests to professors?

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1



Descriptives

	Pre-test		Post-test 1		Post-test 2	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Control	7.5	1.15	7.45	.94	7.95	1.14
Treatment	8.26	1.05	11.2	1.03	11.04	1.22

Statistical results

- One-way repeated measures ANOVA tests indicated significant changes across time for the treatment group ($F(2, 21) = 77.2, p = .000$, partial eta squared = .88), but not for control group ($p > .05$).
- Treatment group's changes from pre-test to post-test 1 ($p < .001$) were maintained at post-test 2 ($p > .05$).
- One-way ANCOVA tests indicated the treatment group significantly outperformed the control group in both immediate post-test ($F(1, 40) = 134.9, p = .000$, partial eta squared = .77) and delayed post-test ($F(1, 40) = 58.4, p = .000$, partial eta squared = .59).

Results: Research Question 2

In what aspects (if any) is the improvement evident?

Request forms

	Strategies		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
Pre-test	43 57.3%	32 42.7%	75 100%
Post-test 1	11 14.5%	65 85.5%	76 100%
Post-test 2	20 26.3%	56 73.7%	76 100%

- Results of Chi-square for independence indicated significant difference in the treatment group's choice of direct and indirect strategies across time: $\chi^2 (2, 227) = 33.6, p = .000$

Greetings

	Forms of Greetings		
	Incorrect	Correct	Total
Pre-test	58 77.3%	17 22.7%	75 100%
Post-test 1	8 10.7%	67 89.3%	75 100%
Post-test 2	11 14.7%	64 85.3%	75 100%

- Results of Chi-square for independence indicated significant difference in the treatment group's choice of direct and indirect strategies across time: $\chi^2 (2, 225) = 93.2, p = .000$

Closings

	Closings		
	Zero	Incomplete	Complete
Pre-test	39 26.5%	51 34.7%	57 38.8%
Post-test 1	8 5.4%	82 55.8%	57 38.8%
Post-test 2	12 8.0%	62 41.3%	76 50.7%

- Results of Chi-square for independence indicated significant difference in the treatment group's choice of direct and indirect strategies across time: $X^2 (4, 444) = 40.4, p = .000$

Summary of findings

- RQ1:
 - The treatment group scored significantly higher in the two post-tests than in the pre-test
 - Gains were maintained by the time of post-test 2 (one month after the study)
 - No such improvement was observed by the control group
- RQ2:
 - The treatment group produced a significantly greater number of indirect requests in the two post-tests than in the pre-test
 - They also included significantly more correct greetings in the two post-tests
 - They omitted closings significantly less often in the two post-tests. However, their closings were still largely incomplete

Discussion & conclusion

- Benefits of explicit meta-pragmatic instruction in developing L2 email literacy
- Some aspects (e.g. request forms and greeting moves) are more amenable to instruction than others (e.g. closing moves)
- Limitations of the study

Thank you for your attention!

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