

How to Contact Research Faculty via Email for Best Results

From Dr. Tanya Ferguson

Here are my helpful hints:

1. Address people by their appropriate titles. It shows that you have taken the time to look it up. Calling people Professor, Madam, Sir or Mr./Ms. Smith when they are Dr. Smith is not professional. If you do not know their title, you can always call their department and ask or assume they have an M.D. or Ph.D. and refer to them as Dr.
2. Carefully read all your correspondences before you hit that "send" button. Emails are considered *professional correspondences*, especially if you are trying to stand apart from the rest of the candidates or are asking for them to consider you for a position. Typos and grammatical errors look BAD, equally as bad as if you have typos/errors in your Resume, Cover Letter or essay. Science is an exacting field. If you can't type an email without errors, then it makes one wonder about the rest of your skills. Do not use colloquial language and ditch the LOLs, emoticons :) and other writing short-cuts until you know the person better. Make sure you introduce yourself, including the program with which you are associated, and provide contact information within your letter. Professors receive many requests to work in their lab, so the more information you can give them as to who you are and how they can reach you, the better.
3. When responding to an email from a professor or researcher, read it thoroughly. I cannot tell you how many times I have included all the information the student will need within the email, such as contact information, office location, etc., only to have a student email me back asking me for the same information. These questions tell me that the student did not take the time to read my email the first time. If you do need to ask, then make sure you ask as a confirmation, such as "Dr. Smith, I am confirming that our interview is this Thursday, April 19th at 3 p.m. and will take place in your office, located in MERB 519. Is there anything special I should know about how to enter the building or how to find your office? Thank you, Jane Green"
4. When attaching a resume, do not name it Resume.doc or Resume.pdf. Do you know how many files end up on my computer desktop or download file with that title? Label it with your name: Smith, John Resume 2013.doc or Resume, John Smith, URP.doc. If I want to quickly find your resume again, I will look for your name. I will become grumpy if I have to sort through 19 different files trying to find your resume or if I have to go back to your email to re-download it again, just so I will know which one it is.
5. Do not oversell yourself in your resume. Do not say you have experience in gel electrophoresis or PCR if you have only performed it once in a lab class or if the TA actually set everything up for you. Be very clear as to where your experience has come from, what your true experience is and brush up on those techniques before you interview. This same rule also goes for previous research lab experience. Be honest as to what techniques you know (you can perform the technique if I hand you all the right equipment) versus you have observed or are familiar with the technique. Most labs are very willing to train you and understand that you do not have a lot of experience, but you must be honest about your experience up-front. Getting caught overselling yourself is worse than having little to no experience.
6. When writing a cover-letter, the more specific you can make it to the person's research, the better. Did you just replace the person's name on a generic letter? This will not get you noticed. Did you at least show that you read their provided lab description on the URP website? Better, but still not great. Best, go to their professional website (usually on the Temple University server), read the description of their research and look up their recent papers. Most

researchers have a link to their recent publications on their Temple website. Modify EACH and EVERY cover letter to fit their research in such a way that they will know you took the time to look them up. **Telling** a professor that you feel you can be a great help to their lab, that you are a team player, that you are organized or any other trait to sell yourself is not helpful. **Showing** them that you are interested in their lab by spending time to look up their research is far more useful and will set you apart from the rest of the applications.

Example, Good: "Dear Dr. Smith, My name is Jane Green and I am an undergraduate student from the University Research Program (URP). I applied for a position in your lab and wanted to provide you with a copy of my resume/CV and a cover letter (attached). I am very interested in cancer research and the research in your lab looks very interesting. Thank you for your time, Jane Green".

Example, Better: "Dear Dr. Smith, My name is Jane Green and I am an undergraduate student from the University Research Program (URP). I applied for a position in your lab and wanted to provide you with a copy of my resume/CV and a cover letter (attached). I am very interested in cancer research and the research in your lab looking at specific tumor markers, such as those found on breast cancer cells, looks very interesting. I noticed in your most recent publication, BX-191, a potential target for breast cancer cells, that you are using molecular genetics techniques, such as gel electrophoresis, mutagenesis and PCR, to help you modify the protein for targeting. I am familiar with these techniques, as reviewed in my resume and discussed in my cover letter. I was intrigued by the fact that you were able to kill a significant number of these cells by mutating a single amino acid. Please let me know if space is still available in your lab for an undergraduate researcher. I look forward to meeting with you soon, Jane Green"

7. If you are lucky enough to get an interview, come prepared. You should have read their 3 most recent publications that are relevant to the project you are interested in and you should be able to discuss their research in some detail. Have questions prepared. Even if you don't know the area or subject matter, at least showing that you made an effort will take you a long way!

8. If you are running late, call and apologize without a lot of excuses (a brief explanation is fine). Do not send an email, as most people are not sitting in front of their computers waiting for your email. Best plan, send an email AND call. If you do not speak with the professor directly or to a secretary who can deliver your message, then call again closer to your interview time. Leaving a voice mail does not guarantee it will be heard before you arrive. Also, do not show up 30 minutes early. If you arrive way too early, enjoy the lobby for a while before showing up to the interview location. 5-7 minutes early is fine