ual: london college of fashion



Illustration by Priscilla Fung

How to communicate professionally

LCF Graduate Futures

What is professionalism?

Professionalism is the conduct, behaviours and attitude of someone in a work environment. Being professional involves being self-aware and respectful of how your words and actions will be interpreted. There is an expectation to exhibit qualities such as honesty and integrity. Demonstrating professionalism contributes to workplace success, personal success and a strong professional reputation.

Communicating through email

Emails are the most common method of communicating in a professional context. Therefore, it's important to use appropriate etiquette. Email etiquette refers to being polite and respectful, including a courteous greeting and ending. It's also important to be considerate of the recipient's time. Emails should be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Confident
- Credible

You should avoid sending emails outside of standard work hours.

Internal emails

These are emails which are sent and received within employees of a company. Sometimes these may be less formal than traditional emails, it's important to remain professional. Don't write anything that you wouldn't want people in the company to read. Many companies keep copies of employee's emails on a company server.

- Do not expect an immediate response.
- Think about your response before replying – your tone of voice may be misread.
- Only copy in (CC) those who need to see the email.
- Avoid using emoticons.

External emails

When writing an external email, you are emailing a person that is outside of your organisation.

- Don't send unnecessary attachments.
- Be polite and respectful.
- Be concise. Everybody can gain access to all of the email addresses on the cc list, so be mindful of this.
- Although you are emailing as an individual, you are representing the company at all times.



Babett Kürschner, Around LCC and Studio © Alys Tomlinson



Interview with Joel Masson © UAL Image Library

Calls and messaging

Instant communication is an indispensable tool, with workplaces and society becoming more digital. Texts and messaging systems have overtaken phone calls. It's important to distinguish between how you would message in a professional context compared to how you message your friends.

- If somebody's status or alerts say 'busy' or 'away' be respectful of this.
- Don't include anything that you wouldn't put in an email.
- Keep it brief and concise.
- Keep the communication inside of work hours, where possible.
- Although it's tempting to communicate using emoticons, keep it professional. An emoticon here and there with the right person is okay but it's best to use these sparingly.
- Avoid using "text talk" or over familiar language.

Phone Calls

- Be as prompt as possible when answering the phone.
- Be upbeat and positive when answering. Greet the caller by identifying yourself, your company and establish their reason for calling.
- Always ask before putting someone on hold.
- Recap what you've discussed at the end of the call.

Video Calls

With the rise of video calls through Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other platforms, it's also necessary to consider video call etiquette.

- Make sure to test all your equipment beforehand, including your wi-fi connection.
- Choose a quiet location.
- Keep your mic on mute when you are not speaking to avoid picking up background noise.
- Be prepared and stay on track. Avoid distractions.
- Avoid excessive typing during meetings, unless you are taking minutes.
- If you are going to be on camera, dress appropriately.
- Using the sidebar 'chat' function can be distracting for the person leading the meeting. So keep it focused on the topic of the meeting and use it minimally.

Professional Conduct

Attitude

Having a positive attitude at work is very significant. Your attitude at work can determine the quality of your professional relationships. Affect your productivity level and determine your success.

- A positive attitude at work will reflect in your work ethic and approach to your tasks.
- A positive outlook and a ‘can do’ attitude can make you approachable to others and help maintain a solution-focused approach.

Positive attitudes encourage employee morale and productivity.

Time management

Effective time management skills can have a positive impact on your work.

- Be punctual – Showing up late can give the impression you don’t value the time of others or care about your work. If you are running late, keep your manager informed.
- Manage your workload, stick to deadlines, and monitor your hours accordingly.
- Develop your organisational skills and learn to prioritise tasks.

Difficult Conversations

Difficult or challenging conversations can sometimes arise in the workplace. They are often conversations where emotions and information need to be managed sensitively. This includes complaints and grievances. Conflict resolution is a business term for the raising of an issue and the finding of a workable solution.

- Conflicts should always be raised with a manager.
- It’s important to only deal with facts and maintain professionalism even in challenging times.
- If you are ever struggling with how to respond to a particular issue, consult with a close colleague or workplace mentor for advice.

Dress code

Dress codes are used to communicate to employees what an organisation considers as appropriate work attire. A dress code or appearance policy allows an employer to set expectations, of the image it wants the company to convey. Dress codes can be formal or informal depending on the workplace. Make sure you dress appropriate for your workplace, to develop a suitable professional image.



Tutor speaking with Student, Central Saint Martins © Ana Blumenkron

Respectful working

A respectful workplace is one which embraces professionalism, integrity, trust, fairness, openness, and understanding. Respect is a key need for a healthy work environment. It promotes teamwork and increases productivity and efficiencies. Respect in the workplace, can also be consideration for self, others, and the environment. In practice this means:

- Remain polite and courteous with everyone you come into contact with.
- Familiarise yourself with your workplace policy and workplace culture.
- Listen to what others have to say before expressing your viewpoint. Never speak over or cut off another person.
- Treat people the same no matter their race, religion, gender, professional status, size, age, or country of origin.