Communication with Professors and Peers

As a researcher you will be interacting with faculty and staff on almost daily basis. It is important to maintain professionalism while communicating with both peers and professors.

Learning Objectives:

1. Communicating with professors
2. Communicating with other team members
3. Communicating with peers

Communicating with Professors

Professors’ communication styles vary. Some professors enjoy being involved in the minutia of research activities (e.g., working beside their students in the lab), while others take a hands-off approach (e.g., delegating responsibilities to a graduate student researcher). Because of these differences, it is important to be aware of your research advisor’s preferred communication style and preferences early within your research experience. Being proactive is a necessary skill as an undergraduate researcher, so ask your advisor his or her preferences for obtaining updates about your research progress and about communicating issues that may arise during your experience. Although some professors may prefer email communication, others prefer face-to-face or even virtual meetings. At the beginning of your research experience, ask your professor what mode of communication he or she prefers, and how often he or she would like to receive written or oral updates of your research.

Communication with Other members of the research team

Within your undergraduate research experience, you also might have to communicate with visiting scientists, laboratory technicians, postdoctoral researchers, or with graduate students. Visiting scientists may be from your local institution or another institution. They also might be faculty or global scholars who are interested in learning about the research in your group. Laboratory technicians are often people who have technical skills to help in the day-to-day running of the laboratory or in the maintenance of equipment. Postdoctoral researchers are individuals who have earned Doctor of Philosophy degrees or PhDs in their areas of expertise. Although they are not professors, they are senior researchers on a team who know how to write grants and proposals. Graduate students in your lab could either be pursuing a Master’s degree or a PhD. Remember to be courteous and formal in communicating with each of these non-faculty members. These people are heavily committed to the research and the lab that you are part of, and might have considerable expertise and knowledge about that field.

Peer communication

Communicating with peers is likely to be a little less formal than communicating with professors although professionalism is still a key aspect of this communication. As with your professors be concise in your communication with your peers. Ask what type of communication they prefer.
and understand what type of communication you prefer. Work out a common communication mode between you and your peers. If you are communicating via email (which will be the case most of the time), don't forget to use proper email etiquette. You can be semi-formal in your emails, but remember to be respectful towards your peers. Do not bad mouth other people and do not use texting abbreviations such as LOL even while communicating with a fellow undergraduate researcher. Remember that your peers can have diverse viewpoints about the research you are conducting. In such cases, keep an open attitude towards their suggestions and present your suggestions in a firm, and succinct manner. While communicating, don't forget to be empathetic to your peers. Be professional in your attitude towards your peers and respect any meeting times they have allocated for you. Remember, your peers are just as valuable to the research team as you are, and deserve respect like every other team member. As such, treat them with proper respect that you would award a Professor, a senior graduate student, or an expert in your field.

References for Peer communication:


http://www.halogensoftware.com/blog/10-rules-of-effective-peer-to-peer-communications