



EAB

Student Success Collaborative

# Email Templates and Best Practices

Resources from *Breaking Through the Student  
Communications Barrier*

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# Student Communications Best Practices

## ► Make Your Subject Line Do More Work

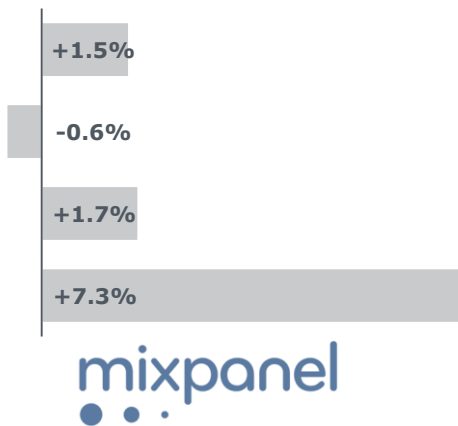
*A Good First Impression Drives Higher Open Rates*

### Insights from Out-of-Industry

*Mixpanel Analysis of 85,637 Subject Lines*

**13.5%** Benchmark open rate for 1.7 billion emails

### Change in Open Rate



### Nine Effective Approaches

*Adapted from Advisory Board's Internal Guidelines*

<b>Catchy</b>	Oops—you missed your registration deadline!
<b>Direct</b>	Concerned about your midterm grades
<b>Urgent</b>	URGENT: Your academic plan
<b>Authoritative</b>	Next steps to get you back on track
<b>Conversational</b>	Let's chat about Chemistry
<b>Mysterious</b>	You qualify for a new program!
<b>Guiding</b>	How to improve your GPA at the Tutoring Center
<b>Action-oriented</b>	Schedule some time with me this week
<b>Questioning</b>	Is there a reason you haven't registered yet?

## ► Write for Your Audience

*Effective Messages Are Student-Centered and Student-Friendly*

### Tone Should Focus on Students and Their Goals, Not Rules or Policies

#### Impersonal Copy

"Whitehouse University cares about your success and offers a number of resources for students in need of additional support. Students have found the tutoring center to be critical in improving their GPA for admission into certain selective programs."

#### Student-Centered Copy

"I care about your success and noticed that your math midterm grade is not up to standards for the Business School, which you want to apply for next semester. You should schedule an appointment with the tutoring center."

**50%** Increase in response rate (Royall recruitment campaign)

### Language Should Be Clear to All Students (Including ESL)

#### ► Reduce multisyllabic words

"Exempted" → "Do not need to"

#### ► Remove passive voice

"If you are contacted by your advisor" → "If your advisor contacts you"

#### ► Translate jargon

"Non-credit-bearing" → "Does not count for credit"

#### ► Ensure readability

The Gunning Fog Index is an online tool to assess the grade-level of a given text



**Tool:** "Higher Ed Jargon Reduction Exercise" on [eab.com](http://eab.com)

## ► Don't Ignore Your CTA

*The Call to Action Is Critical, but Often the Hardest Part to Get Right*

### Out-of-Industry Best Practices

#### Include Only One CTA When Possible

42% ↑

increase in clicks when the number of CTAs are reduced from 4 to 1

#### Make Your CTA Stand Out

**Register Now**

Offset CTAs with bold, different colored text, or buttons



#### Lead with a CTA in the Subject Line



Include the CTA in the subject line so students immediately know what they need to do

#### Convey a Sense of Urgency



Use action verbs that convey a sense of urgency, such as "sign up," "schedule," or "pay"



For more on effective student communications, view [\*\*Supporting Student Conversations with SSC\*\*](#) and [\*\*Breaking Through the Student Communications Barrier\*\*](#).

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# Worksheet: Student Communications Audit

## Purpose of the Tool

This worksheet will help you identify common missteps that prevent students from understanding and acting on emails from the university. This worksheet is designed as a group or independent activity to ensure student-friendly communications.

1. Identify the purpose of the message. What is it meant to teach the student or get them to do?

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2. Copy and paste the message into the Gunning-Fog Index online tool: [www.gunning-fog-index.com](http://www.gunning-fog-index.com). Then fill in the following information.

Gunning-Fog Index Score:

Recommended score: **10 or lower**

Number of Words

Recommended number: **<200 words**

Number of 3+ Syllable Words

Recommended number: **<20 words**

3. Use the rubric below to assess the effectiveness of the message's copy.

	Yes	No
Based on question 2, is the message readable for the average student?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the message avoid passive voice? (e.g. <i>must be completed by students</i> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the message address the student as "you" and appeal to their motivation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the message include a clear, urgent next step or call to action?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Identify jargon in the message (words of 3 or more syllables that someone outside of higher education might not know). Translate jargon into plain-speak explanations.

Jargon	Translation
e.g., Prerequisite	e.g., a course you must complete before X

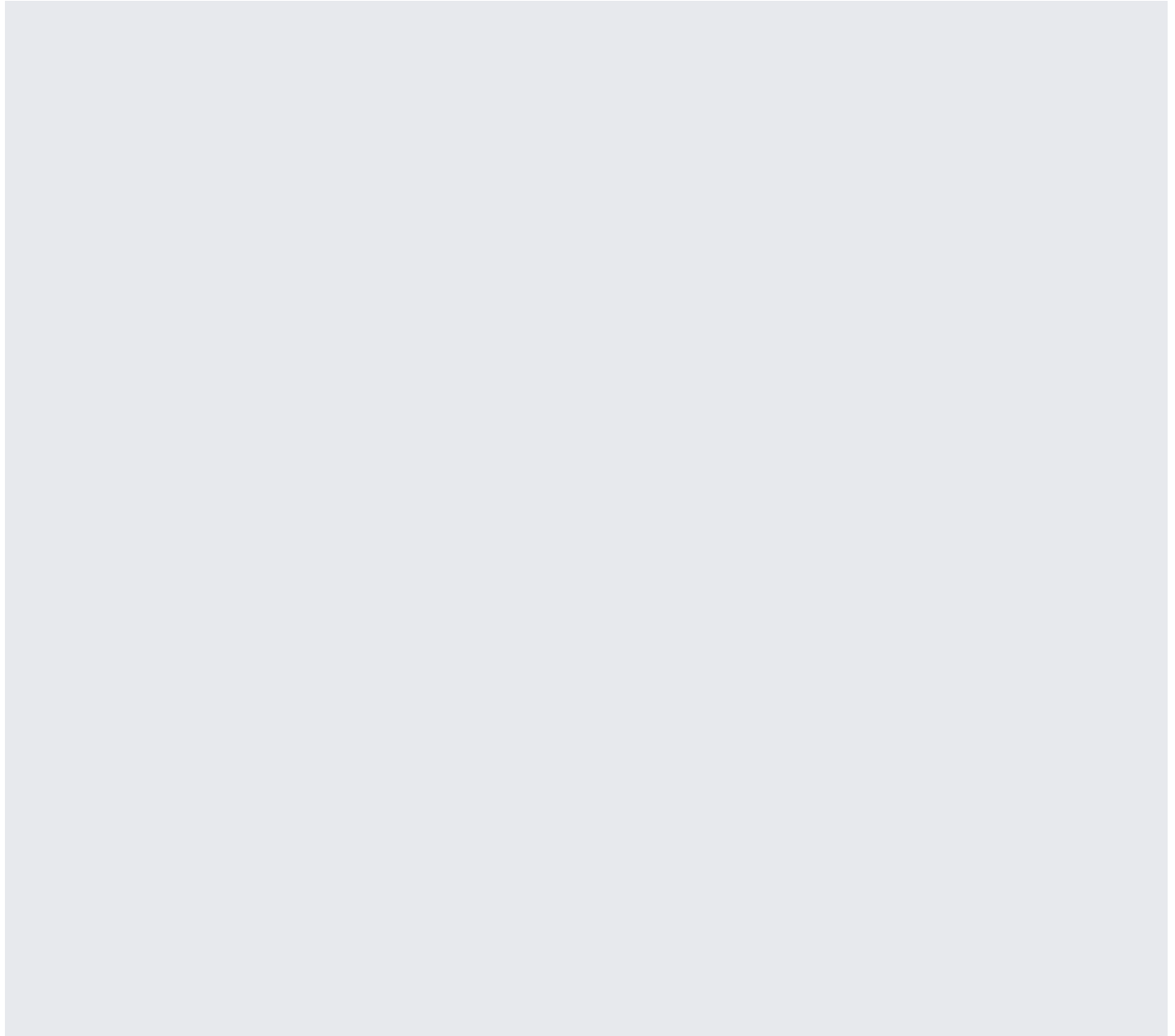
### Word Bank: Common Higher Education Jargon

prerequisite      bursar  
 disbursement      deficit  
 subsidized      registrar  
 dismissal      eligibility  
 probation      audit  
 academic standing      misconduct

# Worksheet: Student Communications Audit

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5. Based on the audit you just completed, revise the message by removing passive voice, appealing to the student's motivation, and including clear next steps. Remove jargon where possible; if you must include jargon, ensure there is sufficient context for the student to understand it.



# Email Templates

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## ▶ Student Seeking Admission into a Selective Program, in Need of Support

Subject: You qualify for our new program!

Dear <FirstName>,

Welcome back! We hope that you had an amazing summer and that you all rested up and ready to start the fall 2014 semester.

As you know, the Nursing program has a competitive admissions process based upon grades earned. Over that last couple of years, the average cumulative GPA for students that have been accepted to the Nursing Program has been **3.7 and above**. You are receiving this email because we've noticed that your cumulative GPA at UNC is currently <GPA 3.0 to 3.5> which qualifies you to take advantage of our new program designed to give pre-nursing students an additional layer of support by meeting with a specialized advisor.

[Use this link to schedule a program appointment](#) or respond to attend one of the office hours listed below.

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## ▶ Student Struggling to Meet GPA Requirements for His/her Major

Subject: URGENT – Chemistry Plans

Hi <FirstName>,

I am writing to follow up about an email I sent a week ago. Most science-related industries generally look for students with a 2.8 GPA or higher. I noticed that you currently have a <Cumulative GPA >2.5>. I would like to meet with you in person to discuss your goals and create action steps together. **Please use the link below on or before Wednesday, October 22 to schedule an appointment during the week of October 27.**

If you have decided to switch majors, please respond to this email and let me know so that I can work with you to ensure that the department does not put an advising hold on your account.

Have a great day!

## ▶ Student Who Missed His/her Registration Deadline

Subject: Is there a reason you have not yet registered for classes?

Name,

Your registration window closes **April 1 (tomorrow)** at 11:00 am. To have the best opportunity to get the classes you want, you need to [register before the window closes](#).

If you are not able to complete your scheduling by 11:00 am tomorrow, you will have to wait until Schedule Clean-Up (April 27–May 8) and you are less likely to get the schedule you want.

If you need assistance, please let me know.

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## ▶ Student Who Made a Successful Major Change

Subject: Excited for your new journey!

Hi FirstName,

I noticed that you successfully changed your major in the system from Mechanical Engineering to Environmental Studies. Congratulations!

As we discussed, I think this major is a great fit for you based on your interest in alternative energy and sustainability issues and your strong performance in your science classes to date.

Are you familiar with the [career services office](#)? I would recommend you visit to learn more about opportunities in the field of sustainability. If you are interested, **let me know before the end of May and I can put you in touch with one of my colleagues who is a career counselor there.**