Dear students,

In this podcast, the skill that I would like to focus on is on email etiquette. I have received a number of emails from students enrolled in this module, and because some students don't follow proper email etiquette there is a delay in me being able to assist you.

Email etiquette is very important not only to get right here in this module, but will also assist in all your studies throughout your university degree. Furthermore, email etiquette is one of the transferable skills that you will develop during your university degree. Email is everywhere when you enter the working world. It is one of the very important digital skills that you must have. Your future employer will expect you to know how to do this, without explicitly teaching you.

In fact, many lecturers at university also assume that you have the skill in place, and then get mad when students do not send proper emails. I am not making that assumption – instead I am assuming that no-one has ever taught you how to write proper emails. There is a very good reason to write emails that is clear and to the point – it is a communication skill – people need to understand what you want, why you want it and how they can help you get what you need. There is a few simple steps to using email effectively.

Step 1: Who is the email to? Email only the necessary people. The less people you include in your email, the better. The more people included in email, the less people are likely to think that they have some action to take. Make sure that you have the correct email address, and that you type it in correctly!

Step 2: What is the email about? The subject line is THE most important line of your email. Tell the person what the email is about in a few key words. Do not write the entire email in the subject line, just enough so that the recipient will know. So for example if you are emailing me with regards to not being allocated into a tutor group a good subject line would be: the module code (APY1501), and tutor group allocation. That way the reader will immediately know what the message is about. It also help if the reader have to forward your email so that the new recipient also know what the email is about.

Step 3: Saying hello… this can be quite tricky because it depends on the power relations between you and the people you are emailing, and how well you know them. A lot of students don't use a salutation because I think they are unsure what to say and how to address their lecturer. The easiest way is to start your email by saying Dear Professor / Dr / Ms followed by their surname. Power relations is key here, sometimes it is okay to address a person by their first name, but if that person is in a position of power and you don't know them, it is better to be slightly more formal, especially in your first interaction. If you are uncertain, it is always better to address someone slightly more formally. Another way to approach it is to think about how you would greet someone if you saw them face to face. Remember there is a person at the end of the email, so also be polite.

Step 4: Writing the message. Here you want to be as concise as possible. Give the recipient all of the information that they need to know but no unnecessary information. Give the necessary context – for example, in an email to your lecturer for APY1501 – it would be useful to tell them that you are a student in the module, but they don't need to know your entire life story unless it relates to the request. So for example if you had a problem with submitting an assignment because you were robbed of your computer,

that would be useful to share with your lecturer but it may not be useful to share that you live Newcastle because that may not be relevant. Be very clear in what you request – don't make the recipient guess what you want.

You should be following normal rules of writing – write out words rather than using slang or shortened versions like writing see you later as a 'c' a 'u' and a 'l8'. Try to the best of your ability to use correct grammar and language and the proper use of punctuation marks like full stops. Do not use unnecessary exclamation marks in professional emails, and generally avoid using emoticons. You should follow this approach even if you are using a mobile device to send an email.

Step 5: How to end an email: Again, the power relations between you and the person you are emailing matter. I find a good way to end an email is to end it by saying Kind Regards, followed by your name. Email signatures are also a good to have at the bottom of an email, because you can standardise your signature with some extra information like your position, or contact number.

Step 6: Expecting an email answer. Please be reasonable in expecting a response time. It is not reasonable to expect an immediate response. No-one should be sitting at their computer and expecting to receive a response within a few minutes of sending your email. Depending on who you have emailed, you may have to wait a couple of days. Weekends do not count as part of your waiting time. If after a reasonable period you haven't heard anything, you may send a follow up email – a good way to do this is to forward the original email and asking the person whether they have seen this and whether they could respond. You must still be polite in your interaction.

In follow up emails it is not necessary to keep on repeating beginning and end greetings because you are in the flow of a conversation.

Some good general rules to follow is to never send an email when you are angry because you may say things in ways that you regret. Always re-read emails and make sure that they are clear and understandable.

Sometimes it is better to phone someone because an email may be too complex. And sometimes, an email is unnecessary because the information that you require is readily available if you look. Remember, it is your task to find publically available information – like those in your tutorial letter or on myUnisa. If you have tried everything and is still unable to find the correct information, then email. But do not send an email when you haven't done the basic work.