

Pragmatics Instruction and Digital Communication

Context:

This activity is designed for adult ESL learners at a community college in the United States. The class is Reading Writing Grammar level 5. These learners are mainly resident immigrants with varied L1 backgrounds. Most of them are employed full time and want to learn English for professional, personal, social, and possibly academic purposes.

The class is organized around functions associated with family, school, and work as a way to explore different genres of writing that may be useful to students in those contexts (resumes, application forms, emails, etc.). This activity will be a part of a unit focusing on functions related to school related activities.

While most students in this context have smart phones, many are unfamiliar with digital literacy skills associated with desktop computers.

Procedure:

Warm-up: Ask students to discuss the questions in activity 1 in pairs and then debrief.

Part 1 – Observation:

1. Add another discussion question: How do you begin a text message or email to a friend? After some examples, get students in groups of 4 and ask them to use their phones to check their intuitions. They write down 3 observations (activity 2) and then class debrief. The teacher can discuss tendencies associated with digital communication based on time efficiency and space economy. Keep key ideas on the board for later (see step 4).
2. Introduce the subject of relationships in communication: Do we communicate with teachers in the same way we do with peers?
3. Introduce topic of email genre citing importance for academic and professional environments: What are some reasons to send an email to a teacher?



4. Hand out blacked out emails (see **materials – first set of strips** below) to pairs and ask them to complete activity 3. Then debrief.

Part 2 - Analysis:

5. Pass out strips of different emails (see **materials – second set of strips** below) and highlighters to groups of 4 students. Ask them to highlight in green any parts that seem appropriate for social emails, but less so for an email to a teacher. Debrief and look at examples: e.g. all caps, multiple exclamation points, emojis, texting abbreviations, rude content, slang, etc.
6. Then ask them to highlight in yellow any parts that seem fitting for an email to a teacher. Debrief and look at examples: e.g. appropriate length, including greetings, using please and thank you, specific grammatical structures, etc.
7. Keep the rules and notes on the board for use by students in the extension activity.

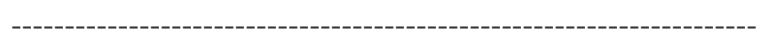
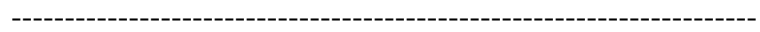
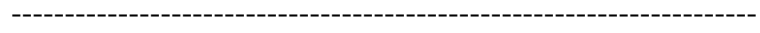
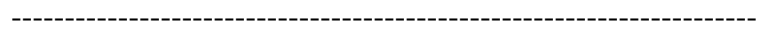
Part 3 – Extension:

8. Still in groups of 4, ask students to rewrite one of the emails indicating a pragmatic misstep and make it ready to send to a teacher. They can use the notes on the board as a guide.
9. As debrief, each group can use the document camera to share their emails and receive feedback from their peers and teacher.
10. As homework, students can find a personal or professional email they have sent or received, and follow the same procedure used in class to analyze how successful it was for its purpose. They can use the highlighters and the rules seen in class to justify their answers and explain why it's OK to be casual or why it's necessary to be more formal.



Materials:

First set of strips for step 4 (copy and cut) – Redacted emails



[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Second set of strips for step 5 (copy and cut)

can u tell me how to do number 4 on the problem set. i no u went over it in class but i have had a VERY LONG week lol tests ha ha ha and i lost my notes. pleeease help
Stu

Dear Dr. Smith,
Thank you for your feedback on my first draft. I would like to talk to you about your suggestions, but I work during your regular office hours. Would it be possible to make an appointment with your for a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday afternoon?
Kind Regards,
Jane Doe
ENG 410

hi im in youre class next semester and want to know what books i will need
thnx

Mz Kierbow
I wanted to let you no I wont be in class tomorrow cuz ive got court



By Sarah Murphy



Heyy,

I know our final was this mornin but for the first time in 5 years i overslept! and i didnt know they were turning the wator off in Arbow View, where i live, so i had problems with that this morning and was unable to het to class in time to take it!

Im am soo sorry i know that our revisions are due today also and i have mine that i need to give you,so is there any way i can PLEASE take the final on another day. Any day at all in fine with me!!!

Hi Trish,

I hope all is well. I am working on my final essay, but I would appreciate your advice on what I have done so far. Would it be possible to make an appointment to meet with you this week? I am free M/W/F mornings and T/Th after 2pm. Would any of these times work for your schedule?

Thanks so much.

Best,

Sarah

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