How to write an e-mail.

E-mail is still developing its forms. I want you to succeed, which starts by not annoying people when you send them e-mails. It's not undemocratic to treat people courteously. The most courteous format, the one that treats the person you are e-mailing to with the correct degree of respect, is that of the traditional, written letter, in this order:

[**date and return address** is supplied automatically, so you don't normally need it in an e-mail, *unless you are asking for ordinary mail contact*. You'd be surprised how many times people ask for things to be sent by mail yet give no place to send them to.]

Mailing address of the person, if you are imitating the letter form more exactly—e.g. for a job application. Giving the address adds more formality.

Dear Title and Last Name of Person [e.g. Dear Professor McCloskey**. No "Hi Professor McCloskey"** or any variants you might think up; stick with the regular forms, which in English have pretty much reduced to "Dear." We've lost the older forms of address to senators and kings, Your Excellency and that sort of things. Obviously with a close friend none of this matters, but you don't need advice on how to deal with close friends: I want you to succeed with strangers]: {little detail: if it is a formal letter *use a colon*—that's "McCloskey**:**" --- but if it's a letter to a friend, or meant to be a non-business letter use a comma---"Deirdre**,**"   So the rule is, *if you're using someone's last name you must not be a close friend*, so in that case use the colon. By the way, *at good universities professors are embarrassed to be called "Dr."* (you can tell a weak professor by his insistence on being called "Dr."); but they do like to be called "Professor." In my case, "Most Distinguished Professoressa," if you please [← joke, joke: it's the Italian feminine].

Introduce yourself in one short sentence if necessary, *but only if necessary*, and anyway in a fashion relevant to what you are doing: "I am applying for the position advertised in your department of marketing" or "I am a student in your [name of course]." Never, never say (in an e-mail or any other time), "You don't remember me, but." You should act in a self-respecting fashion.

[**Do not apologize for "disturbing" the person, or "taking up his time," or say "I know you're busy, but."** If you're writing to the person it must be someone who <u>should</u> be "disturbed." Otherwise you shouldn't write at all, correct? So there's no need to apologize. Professors, for example, are paid to answer reasonable questions posed by students.]

State your question or other business. *You need not be desperately brief if the matter is complex*, but of course brevity is good. Normally there should be some *point* to e-mailing the person: you should end by asking her to *do* some particular thing, for example (submitting a grade, recommending you for a job, granting you an interview for a job, etc.). Tell her what to do, politely. But don't grovel. It's wise to keep a somewhat formal tone in a letter to a stranger. Use rather elevated diction [← I'm doing it right now: instead of, "Talk a little bit fancy"]. It is also wise to keep your temper—though sometimes a letter is *meant* to injure or outrage.

In a formal business letter (one that used the colon, remember!) always **end with**

Sincerely,

Your Full Name

That will do fine for any business situation (other formal "closings" as they are called—such as "Yours truly,"--- have fallen out of fashion). For a close friend you of course can do anything: "See you around, you jerk," [but always add that comma before a new line and your name]. But for less than close friends you can choose among "Yours," [close friends, even lovers], "Regards" [someone you've met and have a reasonably warm relationship with], "With warm regards" (a warm acquaintance, not a close friend), "Love" (*women only* are allowed to use this to someone other than a very close friend or relative; men use "Warm regards" in the same situation).