

The Cold Email Playbook

How to secure mentorship and lab space without getting ignored.

The biggest difference between a local winner and an international winner is often access to a professional lab or an expert mentor. However, university professors are incredibly busy. If you send a generic or demanding email, they will ignore it. If you send a strategic email, you might gain access to a million-dollar facility.

The Golden Rule of Outreach: Prove you have done the work before you ask for help.

What NOT to Do

- **Do not send a massive wall of text.** Keep it under three brief paragraphs.
- **Do not ask them for an idea.** You must have a specific hypothesis or goal already formed.
- **Do not ask for a job or a lab spot immediately.** That is too big of an ask for a first email. You are simply asking for a conversation.

The Winning Email Structure

- **The Hook:** Prove you read their specific, recent published work.
- **The Value:** Explain your own project in one highly technical sentence.
- **The Ask:** Request a 10-minute virtual meeting to ask a specific question.

The Cold Email Template

Copy this template, but ensure you customize the bracketed information thoroughly. Do not leave any brackets behind.

Subject: High School Student Research Question regarding [Insert Their Specific Research Topic]

Dear Dr. [Last Name],

My name is [Your Name] and I am a high school student at [Your School]. I recently read your publication on [Insert Name of Paper] and was fascinated by your specific findings on [Insert one highly specific detail so they know you actually read it].

I am currently designing an independent research project exploring [Insert your specific topic, for example: opto-elastomeric sensors for bipedal gait stability]. I am running into a technical challenge regarding [mention one specific problem, like signal interference or material calibration] and I am looking for some brief expert guidance.

I know you are incredibly busy, but would you have 10 minutes next week for a quick Zoom call? I would love to ask you two brief questions about your methodology.

Thank you for your time and your continued work in this field.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Optional: Link to your LinkedIn or a digital portfolio if it looks highly professional]

Next Steps After Hitting Send

Wait exactly one week. If they do not reply, send one short follow-up email. Reply to your original message and say: "Dear Dr. [Name], I know you are busy, so I just wanted to float this to the top of your inbox. If you do not have time right now, I completely understand." If they still do not reply, move on to the next professor on your list.