

Freezing Cold Emails: Email Template and Tips for Finding a Research Mentor

Is there a doctor or researcher you admire and would love to get involved with their projects? Does reaching out seem daunting and you don't know where to start? Have no fear - cold emailing is one of the best ways to network for both students and faculty alike! It is both a skill and an art that can be honed with practice, and you'll soon be melting that email ice with ease :)

Why send a freezing (or slightly cold) email?

While some students find mentors through fellow classmates, faculty lecturers, Doctoring or Mary B Arnold mentors, Deans, Director of Student Research ☺, peer mentors, specialty advisors, Careers in Medicine panelists, PCE advisors, or others who can bridge a connection, sometimes there may not be a direct connection. Cold emails are not necessarily the first option, but it is totally acceptable to contact faculty directly which might lead to a great collaboration, and unique or new opportunities. Cold emails are a bit daunting to send out the first few times, but they can be a very effective manner of getting research positions, and will be a strategy used throughout your career, even as a senior faculty member.

Before crafting your email, consider these key tips:

- Always use your @brown.edu email address – this will prevent messages from going to Spam and lets faculty know clearly you are part of the Brown community.
- Do your homework and know who you're contacting. Thoroughly research the researcher on Researchers@Brown, Google Scholar, etc. Become familiar with their past research projects, clinical work or talks they've given. These details will help you tailor your message to show interest and begin building a genuine connection with the potential mentor. Do not copy and paste a duplicated generic email to send to many different faculty members.
- Use clear and concise language. Introduce yourself, and briefly explain why you are contacting them specifically. Did another faculty member or student refer you? Is there something specific about their research that you find particularly exciting? **If you are contacting faculty about a specific research program let them know about the details.** Example: *"I am interested in participating in the medical student summer research assistantship (SRA). This program supports full time research for medical students to work with Brown faculty during the summer between the first and second year of medical school."* This gives enough information about the program (hopefully they already know about it). You may want to include the dates of the program too.
- Mention your relevant experience and skills, and note how your goals align with their work. Attach a 1-page CV (brevity is key so faculty are not spending excessive times scanning your CV for relevant information).
- Lastly, always proofread your emails to be sure they are free of typos or other errors before sending.

General Email Structure:

- Step 1. Introduce Yourself: Who are you?
- Step 2. Explain why you're emailing them about THEIR research. What about their research intrigues you?
- Step 3. How could you contribute to their research? What skills do you have?
- Step 4. Why should they pick you? Think about what you've done that could demonstrate that you are a strong candidate. You have a lot more skills than you may give yourself credit for!
- Step 5. Call to Action. What are you asking for?
- Step 6. Attach your 1-page CV to the email, and mention you've included it: "I've attached my CV here for reference."
- Step 7. Proofread: Review your email one last time before sending it out!
- Step 8. Wait for a response and follow-up if needed.

Example Template:

Dear Dr. _____,

My name is _____, and I am a ____-year medical student at Warren Alpert Medical School. I am reaching out to you because I am extremely interested in your work in _____ after I read your recent article/attended your talk on _____. This research was fascinating to me because.

My prior experience includes _____ and I have developed skills in _____ (skill bank these are just suggestions: literature review, systematic reviews and/or meta analyses, data cleaning, statistical analysis using _____ software, manuscript writing, and basic science techniques including _____), disseminating research on social media, etc.). My CV is attached.

[IF APPLICABLE and you have a project you want to propose]: In line with my interest in this field, I have the following project proposals:

- 1.
- 2.

I would greatly value the chance to connect with you to discuss how I might be able to contribute to your ongoing projects and to review the potential merit of my project proposals. Please let me know if it would be possible to meet or chat briefly on Zoom. Even if you are not available to be a mentor, I would still love to hear about your work on _____.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Your Name

The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, MD '28

Adapted using the following resources and with support from David Painter (MD25)

<http://research.berkeley.edu/howcoldemailprofessor>

<https://www.acr.org/Member-Resources/Medical-Student/MESO-News/Art-of-Cold-Emailing>

<https://bellala.org/advising/finding-research/>

<https://www.bumc.bu.edu/medstudentresearch/contacting-faculty-about-research/>

I've hit send, now what?

Faculty might not even respond right away as they are extremely busy and might miss your initial email. A simple follow up after 1-2 weeks can be a gentle reminder; limit yourself to one follow up to ensure your chances of receiving a response. If they respond positively, be flexible and accommodate their schedule.

The worst-case scenario is receiving no response, which is okay. If they decline, thank them for their time and consideration, and express your hope to reconnect in the future. Either way, move on and continue to reach out and watch as opportunities unfold. And all it takes is one yes!

They responded and want to meet! Now what?

Before your meeting to discuss research projects it is helpful to read through the last 2-3 papers from the faculty (look at Google Scholar). This will help you familiarize yourself with their work. Try to have a few questions in mind. Always arrive a few minutes early, but not too early. At the meeting/interview be prepared describe a bit about your path, why you are interested in their research, and if you are interested in a specific research program describe the details at this meeting. Ask about their research colleagues and who else you would potentially be working with. Ask about their expectations for research including time commitments. Be clear at the meeting what your availability is to perform research.

After the meeting make sure to email to thank them for your time and let them know you if you are still interested in working with them.