

Finding a new research experience can be an intimidating process. Some students find their first positions through formal programs (see [here](#) for a list of examples), but many also choose to ‘cold contact’ professors. Cold contacting means that **you** are actively reaching out to professors and initiating the conversation about potential research opportunities. The most common way to cold contact a professor is through email. This can be an effective way to demonstrate interest in a professor’s work, but also requires dedicated time and effort. Here are some tips and tricks to help you with the process!

### **Before you draft your email...**

Do your research. Identify and shortlist a (manageable!) number of professors whose research you’re interested in. You can do this by:

- Consulting department faculty pages
- Talking to grad students (ex: your BIO120/130 or CHM135/136 TAs, Trinity Academic Dons)
- Talking to upper-year students who have worked in labs
- Attending seminars and lectures

### **Draft your email template**

If you’re cold contacting multiple professors, it can be useful to draft a customizable email template. While there is no set formula for a successful cold email, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. The Introduction. This is your opportunity to quickly explain who you are and why you’re emailing the professor.

Definitely include:

- “Dear Dr. [insert last name here],”
- Your name
- That you’re an undergraduate student
- What you’re studying

Optional things to include:

- Your year (useful if the professor is known to mentor younger students)
- Your college (useful if the professor is a Trinity alum)
- That you’re interested in pursuing a research project under the professor
- When you’re hoping to pursue the research position (summer vs term)
- Whether you’re looking for paid vs volunteer experience

2. The Pitch (A). This is the part where you articulate how your research interests align with the professor’s research. This is also the most important part, since professors want students who are interested in *their research*, not just any research experience.

Definitely include:

- Your research interests
- Aspects of the professor's research that you find particularly fascinating. Here, you can demonstrate interest by letting the professor know that you found out about their work by:
  - Reading some of their papers (cite which ones!)
  - Talking to one of their graduate/upper-year students
  - Attending one of their talks or seminars
- 3. The Pitch (B). This is the part where you highlight the skills and experiences that make you a good future research assistant. If you have worked in a lab before, mention that here. This can be brief, since you will also be attaching a copy of your CV/Resumé. If you have done well in your past courses, consider also attaching an unofficial copy of your transcript. If you have never worked in a lab before, here are some things you can still highlight:
  - Laboratory skills: BIO120/130 and CHM135/136 have taught you standard laboratory safety, how to run a PCR reaction on a gel, do a titration... the list goes on! Tip: cross-referencing with your course syllabus may be useful here
  - Soft skills: Your past extracurriculars/work experience have taught you how to be a team-player, leadership, to learn quickly, be independent, etc...

\*Note: if you have little to no experience, it is often more effective to **own your lack of experience and demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm to learn** rather than to inflate or exaggerate the extent of your past experiences.

4. The Conclusion.
  - Express your interest in speaking to the professor or one of their grad students about their research
  - Thank the professor for taking the time to read your email

**Send your email!**

Tip: You can schedule your email to be automatically sent at 6/7am if you want it to be at the top of the professor's inbox in the morning.

**Other things to keep in mind**

- Be specific when explaining why you're interested in the professor's research
- Keep your email short and sweet (think no more than ~250 words)
- Respectfully follow up if the professor doesn't get back to you within 1-2 weeks (often they're just busy and forgot to reply - it's nothing personal!)
- If the professor runs a large lab, consider sending a cold email to one of their grad students instead of the professor. These professors are often very busy, and working for a grad student can be a valuable way to receive more hands-on mentorship!