

Email Template: Request to Join a Research Lab

Joining a research lab is a valuable experience often required in graduate research programs. It provides hands-on experience that strengthens industry applications by developing your analytical, collaborative, and critical thinking skills. Through innovative research, students also gain meaningful relationships with fellow peers and faculty who can later serve as recommenders. Research lab experience is pivotal for some but not all disciplines. Readers that would most benefit from this handout are students from experimental disciplines (e.g., biology, chemistry, psychology).

How to Email a Professor About Joining a Lab

When reaching out to a professor to inquire about joining their research lab, it is important to craft a professional and concise email.

1. Clear Subject Line

Make your subject line clear and direct. Professors receive many emails daily; a succinct subject line allows your email to catch their attention easier.

Example: Interest in Joining [Name of Lab]—[Your Name]

2. Formal Greeting

Begin with a formal introduction; it is used to establish a respectful and professional tone. You should approach the greeting as you would in a job interview.

Tip: Be sure to use proper [Email Etiquette](#), grammar, and punctuation throughout your email.

Example: "Dear Dr. [Last Name]," or "Hello Professor [Last Name],"

3. Introduction and Intent

Start by introducing yourself and stating the purpose for your email along with a brief overview of your educational background. These details will provide the professor with context about who you are and why you are writing the email.

Tip: If you have taken their class before (or are taking it currently), include the class name and semester in which you were enrolled.

Example: "I hope this email finds you well. My name is [Your Name], and I am a [your current academic status and institution/class and term]. I am reaching out to see if you have any openings for a graduate student in your lab."

4. Research Interests

Clearly state your research interests. Learn more about the professor and their lab to ensure you can connect your interests to their area(s) of expertise.

Tip: Check if the professor has a website. It will usually provide the lab's mission statement, current and past students' work, and citations of research papers of the professor's published work. Most importantly, the website will provide the professor's contact information.

Example: "My research interests lie in [specific area, e.g., early clinical predictors, memory processing, executive function, etc.], particularly in understanding [specific focus/population, e.g., executive abilities in Alzheimer's disease]."

5. Research Interests and Relation to the Professor's Current Work

State how your current research interest aligns with the professor's. Taking this step sets a common ground for initial connection.

Ask yourself the following questions when writing this portion of your message:

“What aspects of their work do I find most interesting?”

“How can I add/relate my research interests in a feasible way?”

Tip: Consider what resources the lab has. A lab may not have a brain scanning machine, but perhaps it has a dataset with brain imaging data and software that can analyze brain scans. Demonstrate your knowledge about the lab to show that you've “done your homework.”

Example: "I find that my interests in [subject] align closely with your research on [specific research topic], particularly your work on [mention a specific project, paper, or study they conducted]."

6. Relevant Experience

Give a brief summary of relevant coursework, poster presentations, conference presentations, research experiences, and/or other qualities that make you stand out as a strong candidate. Including these details allows the professor to see that you would benefit from their lab.

Example: "I recently worked on a project investigating [brief description of project] under the guidance of [advisor's name]. Through this experience, I developed skills in [list relevant skills such as data analysis, programming, article analysis]. I also recently engaged in a poster presentation entitled [list title] with a group of fellow students at [list conference/event]."

7. Inquiry about Open Position

Politely ask if there are any current opportunities to join their lab and express interest about discussing potential research ideas. It is important to *ask*—you do not want to assume that there are open positions in a research lab. A professor may not have an open lab position at the time, but it is important to keep in touch if possible (e.g., taking one of their classes, expanding research skills).

Tip: Add or create a Curriculum Vitae ([CV](#)) to attach to the email. Doing so will allow the professor to view all your experience that did not fit into the email.

Example: "I would love the opportunity to further discuss whether there are available positions in your lab. Please let me know if you are accepting students for [semester/year]. I have attached my CV for your review."

8. Closing

End with a polite closing. Be sure to include your full name and contact information.

Example: "Thank you for your time and consideration."

Best regards,
[Your Name]
[Your Email]
[Your Phone Number] (optional)
[Your University]

Sample Email

Subject: Interest in Joining [Name of Lab] – [Your Name]

Hello Dr. [Last Name],

I hope this email finds you well. My name is [Your Name], and I am a [details about your academic status, including what you are studying]. I am reaching out to ask if you have any openings for students in your lab starting in [semester and year].

My research interests lie in areas such as [choose one or two, e.g. memory, executive function] particularly in understanding [specific focus, e.g., structural connectivity changes in older adults]. I find that my interests align closely with your research on [specific topic], particularly your work on [mention specific project, paper, presentation, or study].

I recently worked on a project investigating [brief project description] under the guidance of [advisor's name]. Through this experience, I developed skills in [list relevant skills, e.g., data analysis, Python, article analysis].

I would love the opportunity to discuss how our research interests align and whether there are any available positions in your lab. Please let me know if you are accepting students for [semester/year]. I have attached my CV for your review. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Your Email]
[Your Phone Number]
[Your University]

Activity: Mock Scenario

Now that we have reviewed the details for what to include in an email to join a research lab, it's time to practice! Write a mock email from the student whose details are listed below. Details about the professor and potential research lab are also provided. Ensure that you're including all aspects of the template on the previous page.

Student Information

Name: Perry Perez

Year: Second-year graduate student

Major: Mechanical Engineering

University: San José State University

Research Interests:

- Unstable energy source management
- Autonomous machinery
- Ethical applications of AI

Previous Experience:

- Worked on a semester-long project designing small autonomous vehicles that could follow pre-set paths using Arduino and infrared sensors.
- Experience with Python, MATLAB, and CAD software.

Target Research Lab

Lab name: E.V.I.L. Lab (Experimental Ventures in Invention and Logistics)

Professor of Interest: Dr. Heinz Doofenshmirtz

Department: Engineering

Lab Focus:

- Autonomous systems and improvised robotics
- Safety in experimental device design
- Human-Emotion-Responsive interfaces