NTK Coffee Lectures

Grab your favorite mug, we will start in a moment...

- The lecture will be **recorded.**
- **15–20 minutes**
- Current cycle: every Wednesday at 12.30 (**13 May – 17 June**).

NTK Coffee Lectures

June 3, 2026

Polite Does It: Tips for Academic Communication

Alena Dvořáková

Politeness Is a Skill

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Character trait vs. **communication skill**:

- Correct greeting, address, and sign-off
- Lexical choices (nouns, adjectives)
- Verbal constructions (modal verbs, the conditional)
- Softening turns of phrase (blunt emotions, deflect anger)

Why bother? The aim is to help/improve:

- Express respect for others
- Open up debate (feedback x putdown)
- Promote collaboration

Courtesy takes more time at first, but it saves time later.

Greeting, Address, Sign-off

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A man is being taught how to bow… (1801)

Esteemed and Most Distinguished Professor

Your humble student

Hey

Hey Professor

Hi Lee (to a professor)

Mr. Santos (to a professor)

Listen
I need to ask you something
Reply ASAP

Greeting, Address, Sign-off

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Be correct, respectful, and self-respecting.
Mind the role.

(Dear) Professor Smith,
Dr. Jones,
Dear colleague/author,
Ms. Lee,
Dear Jane (if I may),

Sincerely,
Yours,
With best wishes,
Best wishes,
All the best,
Best,

Dear author,

We are pleased to inform you, that your abstract
that you as main presenter fully register as atte
https://u56728259.ct.sendgrid.net/ls/click?upn=u6
2FMnpxljuATWFoBmo6Q126G9LZi1ZWCm18GyWDPyo3-2FZx8

Dear Conference team,

Many thanks for the good news

With best wishes,
Alena Dvorakova

Verbal Dexterity

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Abrupt assertions shut down debate.
Hypotheticals invite cooperation.

Modal verbs: would, could, may, might

- Would you be open to…,
- I'd suggest…
- Perhaps we could consider…
- This may require further investigation...

Conditionals to open dialogue:

- If we considered the alternative…,
- It could be argued that…
- What would you say to…

Transitions to honest critique:

- That said, couldn't you…
- One area that might…
- I see your point, but wouldn't it be better to...
- Given this analysis, could you clarify…

Disagreeing indirectly:

- I can see why you might object, but…
- I'd (highly) recommend revising this…
- I wonder if this is correct…

Signaling Helpfulness

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Start with the positives:

- I really liked X, but it might help if you also did Y and Z…
- The example you used was good, but we need more detail…
- Your evidence is useful [up to a point, to some degree] but it doesn't go far enough.

Express criticism as helpful suggestions to solvable problems:

- I got a little lost in Section A. Could you [use an example, clarify the move from A to B, provide more evidence for X]?
- Section X doesn't seem relevant enough to your question. Could you clarify?
- Perhaps you could put this in a footnote? (This would work better in a footnote.)
- To show this, you may need [a clearer definition of X].
- [A clearer definition of X] might do the trick…
- I was wondering if it would help to… It might help to [move this to Discussion]…

Softening Turns of Phrase

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Use academic courtesy markers:

- Thank you for [the clarification/comment/suggestion/correction]…
- I/We appreciate [your perspective, your comments, your feedback, your help]…
- We welcome/are grateful for the reviewers' [thorough, helpful] feedback…

Signal respectful engagement:

- Having carefully considered X, we'd like to point out/respond by…
- If I could respond to your second point… In response to X, I'd like to suggest/point out/add...,
- If I may comment on…,
- A good point in general, but in this particular case…
- With all due respect… Wouldn't you agree that…
- I wonder if the reviewers weren't misled by/didn't overlook Table 3 in Section A…

Wonder away! Wondering does wonders for civility.

Response to Reviewers: Real-Life Example

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Journal of Neural Engineering (Round 2)

Guo, X., Zhang, Q., Singh, A., Wang, J., & Chen, Z. S. (2020). Granger causality analysis of rat cortical functional connectivity in pain. *Journal of Neural Engineering*, *17*(1), 016050. https://doi.org/10.1088/1741-2552/ab6cba

Decision Letter 2020/01/16

Author Response 2020/01/09

Content

Mind the role.

Dear editor and reviewers:

Courtesy marker

We would like to take this opportunity to thank reviewers for their constructive comments. Below we are providing point-by-point responses to all comments, and we hope that would be sufficient to address the raised concerns.

Courtesy marker

Best, Zhe S. Chen, PhD
On behalf of all authors

10. It should be reported in the description of Figure 10 that the legend to panels D, E and F is the same as the legend in panel E. Figure 10 should be divided in separated illustrations, i.e. panels A and B on Figure 10; panels D, E and F on Figure 11; and panel C in Table 3.

Courtesy marker

Thank you for the comment and suggestion. We now split the figure and obtain two separate figures and Table 3.

Emotional Danger Zones

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Avoid:

- Personal remarks (“Only an idiot would miss this…”)
- Accusatory “you” (“But you said…,” “You didn’t answer my email…”)
- Reproachful conditionals (“If you had only done what I asked!”)
- Imperatives (“Do this.” “Don’t do that.”)
- Peremptory demands (“You must”, “I need”, “I want to know”)
- Irony and sarcasm (“Oh, really?”)
- Rhetorical exasperation (“Not *again*!”)

Danger Zones Illustrated

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Avoid all sighs of exasperation:

- Clearly, obviously, frankly, no offense, end of story, not again, once again, no way
- You must see… You can't be serious! Surely not! Forget it. No, no, no!
- Try telling this to [xxx]. – Who on earth would think this!
- This is silly! – Only someone really stupid would say this.
- Only [insert the name of a notorious character] would think like this…

Avoid reproachful reminders such as: You haven't replied to my email! When will you reply… ?

Still need to send a reminder or follow-up? Do it gently:

- I'm sorry to nag you but I'm under a strict deadline…
- I'm not sure if my email has reached you so I'm taking the liberty of sending it again…
- Just wondering if you've had time to think about my request?
- I'm wondering if you've had a chance to read my email?

Summary: Politeness Is a Skill

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Be respectful and self-respecting. Don’t flatter or belittle.

Be open & helpful: the aim is to help & improve.

Focus on the work, not the person (student, author, opponent).

Mind your tone:

- Choose specific, objective, work-focused nouns and adjectives.
- Use modal verbs, the conditional, and indirect turns of phrase to soften the emotional edge, and enable debate and collaboration.
- Avoid demands/accusations, irony/sarcasm, and “sighs of exasperation”.

Courtesy takes more time at first, but it saves time later.

NTK Coffee Lectures

May 13, 2026	Data Authorship & Credit
May 20, 2026	ResearcherID: 5 Tips for a Stronger Profile on Web of Science
May 27, 2026	SCITE_ai
June 3, 2026	Polite Does It: Tips for Academic Communication
June 10, 2026	Obsidian
June 17, 2026	Přechod na novou normu ISO 690:2022 v citačních manažerech

Academic Support @NTK

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- Consultations
- NTK tutorials
- Webinars
- YTB playlist (Coffee Lectures)

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