

Empathetic & Supportive Auto-Replies: Practical Guidance for Higher and Further Education

Foreword

At EmilyTest, we are committed to addressing gender-based violence and suicide prevention, and to ensuring that education settings are safe and supportive for all. A core part of this commitment is our ongoing work to strengthen policies, procedures, and practices across the sector.

Building on the Academic Registrar's Council's (ARC) Compassionate Communication in Higher Education Guidance, this guidance on empathetic auto-replies has been created to help institutions shape communications that reflect care and student-centred values. It asks us to put ourselves in students' shoes, to consider the environment and emotions they may be experiencing when they receive a communication from their university or college, and to do all we can to minimise any potential for a negative impact.

We hope the sector finds this resource both practical and helpful. Thank you for your continued commitment to creating safer educational communities for all.

Fiona Drouet MBE
Founder and Chief Executive Officer

This resource provides practical examples of compassionate auto-replies, building on the Academic Registrar's Council's Compassionate Communication in Higher Education guidance.

As part of our joint commitment to supporting students throughout their academic journey, we recognise the importance of effectively communicating with them in a manner that encourages engagement, boosts morale, and promotes their overall wellbeing. Automated responses, emails and one-to-one communications present a valuable opportunity to demonstrate empathy and understanding, particularly during potentially stressful or challenging situations.

Automated responses are often overlooked, yet the wrong tone can have a devastating impact. To help ensure communications remain professional, supportive, and student-centred, we have developed guidelines for writing automated replies. This resource includes important steps and practical examples showing different approaches that can be adapted to your own context.

1. Acknowledge Importance:

Begin the message by expressing appreciation for the student's dedication to their studies and their active engagement with the institutions services.

- Example: "Thank you for your commitment to your academic journey at [Institution Name]. Your dedication to your studies is highly valued."

2. Empathise with Challenges:

Recognise that students may face various challenges and emphasise that the institution is here to support them through difficult times.

- Example: "We understand that university/college life can be demanding, and we want you to know that we are here to support you through any challenges you may encounter."

3. Encourage Engagement:

Encourage students to take advantage of the available university or college services and resources that can assist them in overcoming obstacles and achieving their academic goals.

- Example: “We encourage you to engage with the diverse range of support services available, such as academic advising, counselling, and personal tutors, all of which can help to ensure your success and make your experience at university/college a more positive one.”
- Example: “If you're finding things difficult or just need a bit of extra support, don't forget there are lots of services here for you – such as academic advisors, counselling, and personal tutors. They're all here to help you succeed and make your time at university/college as positive as possible. Reaching out can really make a difference.”

4. Personalise the Message:

Whenever possible, include the student's name in the automated response to create a more personalised experience.

- Example: “Dear [Student's Name], we are here to support you in your academic journey.”
- Example: “Hi [Student's Name], whatever challenges come your way, know that we're here to support you and help you thrive throughout your university/college journey.”

5. Positive Reinforcement:

Use positive language to inspire and uplift the student, reinforcing their capabilities and potential.

- Example: “Your determination and hard work have the power to take you far, and we believe in your ability to succeed.”

6. Provide Clear Instructions:

If relevant, include concise instructions or direct links to resources that can address the student's specific concern.

- Example: “If you need assistance in managing your class schedule, please visit [URL] or contact our student support team at [Email/Phone].”
- Example: “If you’re feeling overwhelmed with your class timetable or just need a hand getting organised, we’re here to help. You can visit [URL] or reach out to our student support team at [Email/Phone].”

7. Reiterate Commitment to Wellbeing:

Remind students that their wellbeing is a top priority for the institution, and support is readily available.

- Example: “Your wellbeing matters to us, and we are here to listen and help you navigate any challenges you may face.”

8. Don’t Shy Away from Crisis Situations:

Reiterate that help is available in a crisis situation and reaching out is crucial.

- Example: “If you ever feel you are at immediate risk of harm, either from yourself or others, please don’t hesitate to call emergency services by dialling **999**. Your safety and wellbeing are the top priority.”
- Example: “If you ever feel that you’re in immediate danger - whether from yourself or someone else - please don’t wait to reach out. Call emergency services at **999**. Your safety and wellbeing are incredibly important, and you’re not alone.”

9. Do Not Reply Function:

We encourage you to signpost students to mailboxes they should contact, if the email address originally used is not for this purpose and/or a Do Not Reply address.

Remember, supportive statements can greatly impact students' willingness to engage with student support. Let your words convey empathy, encouragement, and genuine care to foster a strong sense of community and well-being on campus.

By implementing these guidelines in automated responses, you are helping to build a supportive and inclusive environment that not only contributes to every students' academic success but also enhances their overall university/college experience.

Thank you again for your ongoing commitment to students and their wellbeing.

For further information about the Academic Registrar's Council (ARC), please visit their website at www.arc.ac.uk