

Teacher's Guide to Handling Student Emails: Effective Responses to Common Student Personas

Welcome to the Teacher's Guide to Handling Student Emails! As part of your weekly responsibilities, you will need to respond to various types of emails from students with questions, concerns, or requests related to their academic progress. It is important to be equipped with the right strategies and responses to effectively address these emails and provide appropriate guidance to students.

This guide aims to provide you with insights into common student personas that you may encounter in your interactions via email. It will outline different types of students based on their behaviors, attitudes, and communication styles, and provide practical tips on how to recognize and respond to each type of student persona.

More specifically, this guide recognizes that some students ask questions that do not accurately reflect the underlying issue they are facing. You may come across emails from students that ask a specific question that indicates other issues; with careful analysis, you can provide valuable insights into the help they actually need. These types of questions can serve as cues to identify the root of the problem and guide the students towards the right resources or solutions.

By engaging in a dialogue with such students and asking follow-up questions, you can uncover their true concerns and provide a highly personalized response that addresses their specific needs. While this approach may not result in an instant solution, it can save significant time for both the students and the administrative team in achieving the common goal of helping students pass the exam as quickly as possible.

Throughout this guide, you will learn strategies on how to identify these cues, ask relevant questions, and provide effective responses that not only address the immediate question but also address the underlying issue. By utilizing these techniques, you can deliver highly personalized and effective solutions to students, creating a positive learning experience and helping them achieve their exam preparation goals efficiently.

To help familiarize you with the most common situations you will encounter, learner profiles have been divided into the 12 sections below. While these do not cover every situation, the majority of the emails we receive can be handled with these approaches. During the email training that follows, we will refer to the personas and may mark specific emails with the name of the persona to help you recognize them. Feel free to get in touch if you have any questions about the guide, or at any time during the training.

Happy learning,

Sam

LEARNER PERSONAS

Persona 1: “Default”

Recognition: This type of learner asks fair and straightforward questions, without a history of frequent or concerning emails. They may be new to the course and have not yet shown any indication of fitting into other learner personas. Their inquiries are clear and simple, and they typically require a direct response or a canned response.

Response: If there is no indication that they fit into any of the other learner personas, and they are not known from previous interactions and do not have a lengthy email history, it is generally best to simply answer their question. Checking their email history may not be necessary in most cases, and it is usually more efficient to provide a direct response to their inquiry. While some students may fit into other personas episodically, it is important to address their legitimate questions and concerns promptly.

Persona 2: The Conscientious Learner

Recognition: This type of learner diligently follows instructions, makes progress in the course, and asks clear questions with contextual information. They demonstrate a high level of self-reliance and only reach out for help when genuinely confused or in need of assistance. These students may resemble the default learners (Type 1) mentioned earlier, but they stand out for their conscientiousness in their interactions with instructors. The goal is to guide other students towards adopting the behaviors and self-reliance characteristic of this type of learner.

Response: It is important to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of conscientious learners. Simply responding to their questions in an appropriate manner based on the situation is recommended. This could include providing canned responses, direct answers, Loom videos, or follow-up questions to further clarify their inquiries. By providing prompt and helpful responses, we can continue to support these students in their learning journey and encourage other students to adopt similar behaviors.

Persona 3: Technologically Challenged

Recognition: This type of learner may initially resemble the default learner (Persona 1), but it quickly becomes apparent that they are struggling with technology-related issues based on the types of questions they ask and the frequency with which they seek help or report problems. They may express difficulties with using technology, such as joining Facebook groups, attending Zoom sessions, or submitting essays via Submittable.

Response: Promptly acknowledge and address the technical difficulties faced by these learners. While there may be canned responses available to guide them on how to use various tools or platforms, it may be necessary to go a step further and create short videos demonstrating the specific steps they need to take. This can provide visual guidance and help them overcome any technology-related challenges they are facing.

Additionally, it may be helpful to check if the learner has completed the Welcome Course in the Kajabi LMS or any other orientation materials to ensure they have access to the necessary resources and instructions. Providing prompt and personalized support can help these learners overcome their technical problems and fully participate in the course.

It is important to be patient and understanding while addressing technical issues, as these learners may feel frustrated or overwhelmed. By providing clear instructions and personalized assistance, we can help them overcome technical challenges and continue their learning journey effectively.

Persona 4: No Progress

Recognition: This type of learner has been enrolled in the course for a significant amount of time, and it is expected that they should be making progress by now. They may fall into the Persona 5 or Persona 10 categories, but there are also cases where they have completed all the required tasks and still struggle to make progress. They often exhibit signs of demotivation and fragility, requiring a sensitive approach with a positive attitude.

Response: Once Personas 5 and 10 have been ruled out, it is important to conduct further analysis to identify the specific challenges this learner is facing. This may involve asking follow-up questions, reviewing their writing samples, requesting an essay plan, or discussing possible issues with burnout or exhaustion. The solution will depend on the findings from the investigation, and it may be helpful to use video responses to better understand the complex nature of the issues.

Approach this type of learner with empathy and support, acknowledging their efforts and providing personalized guidance. By understanding their unique situation and addressing their concerns, we can help them overcome obstacles they face.

Persona 5: Does Not Follow Instructions

Recognition: This type of learner can be identified by their history of not following instructions given in the course, study plans, or advice provided through email. They may ask questions that indicate a lack of adherence to prescribed work or activities, and may have a pattern of not following instructions in the past. This behavior may be due to being in a hurry, previous learning experiences, lack of time, or other reasons.

Response: When dealing with learners who are not following instructions, it is important to verify if they have indeed followed the instructions provided. Asking them to confirm their compliance with instructions and providing an opportunity for them to explain how they have followed the instructions can be a good approach. Additionally, external verification, such as checking information in Submittable, Kajabi, or the Facebook group, can help in assessing their compliance.

The response to learners not following instructions may vary depending on whether they are one-time offenders, occasional non-compliers, or serial offenders. For learners who consistently fail to follow instructions, it may be necessary to confront them about this behavior and make it a central topic of

communication until it is addressed. Once the issue is acknowledged, the focus can then shift to addressing their actual language- or IELTS-related issues.

In some cases, learners who are stubborn about taking responsibility for following instructions may require additional attention and guidance to help them understand the importance of adhering to instructions and preparing for the exam in an effective manner.

Approach these learners not following with patience and understanding while also holding them accountable for their responsibilities as a student in the course.

Persona 6: The Dependent Learner

Recognition: Dependent learners can be identified by their constant need for validation and reassurance. They may ask a lot of questions and seek feedback repeatedly, often sending rewritten essays or asking for assistance with basic language-related tasks such as checking grammar or synonyms. These tasks generally are not a good use of their time because they do not help improve in the areas that the test requires. They may struggle with idea generation and tend to compare their work to high-scoring sample essays, believing that there is only one correct answer for everything. Some may lack motivation and expect to be provided with answers without making an effort to learn independently, while others may genuinely lack the skills to learn and help themselves. They may also struggle with courses that require critical thinking or cover foreign concepts.

Response: When dealing with dependent learners, it is important to be understanding and patient. Recognize that they may not have much experience with independent learning and may require a lot of direction to become more autonomous learners. Avoid assuming that they are lazy and instead focus on helping them develop better learning strategies.

Asking follow-up questions and prompting them to think critically by asking them what they think the answer to their question is can be a helpful approach. Clarify that your goal is to help them become better learners rather than just providing answers to their questions. Encourage them to take ownership of their learning process and gradually guide them towards becoming more independent learners.

It may also be helpful to provide guidance on how to effectively use available resources such as the *Welcome Course* or *Critical Thinking Course*, and encourage them to actively engage in the learning process by taking initiative and attempting to solve problems on their own.

Remember to be patient, empathetic, and supportive in your responses while also gently encouraging them to develop independent learning skills.

Persona 7: "Serial Askers"

Recognition: "Serial askers" are students who consistently ask questions about various topics, including grammar, vocabulary, reading, and many other aspects of the course. While it is normal for responsible students to ask questions, especially in the beginning of a course, serial askers tend to ask an excessive number of questions that may indicate an underlying issue. It is important to distinguish between serial

askers who fall into Personas 1 or 6 based on the type of questions they ask and their response to your answers or requests for information.

Response: To respond to serial askers, it may be helpful to ask follow-up questions about their questions in order to determine the root cause of their excessive inquiries. Checking their email history and reviewing their previous questions can also provide insights into their pattern of behavior. If you are unsure about how to handle a particular question or situation, you can assign it to a designated team member or label it as "Assistance Required" and leave a message for further guidance.

Be patient and understanding in your responses while also encouraging the serial askers to try to find answers to their questions independently before seeking assistance. You can provide guidance on how to effectively use available resources, such as self-study materials, online references, the FAQ page, or the Facebook group, and encourage them to develop problem-solving skills.

At the same time, it is important to set boundaries and manage expectations by reminding serial askers that excessive reliance on constant questioning may hinder their ability to develop independent learning skills. Encourage them to take initiative and attempt to find answers on their own; you should also let them know that we are available to provide guidance when needed.

Persona 8: The Engineer

Recognition: The engineer is often literally that: many of our students are engineers and doctors, and they tend to be characterized by their analytical approach to language learning. They view language as a system and tend to approach exams, including band descriptors, scoring, and the correction of mistakes, with a systematic mindset. They may ask very specific questions about the components of essays, spelling or grammar mistakes, and seek precise information on why corrections were made. They may attempt to reverse-engineer their essays based on the requirements of the band descriptors. Engineers, as well as professionals from other technical fields, such as doctors, scientists, and accountants, tend to exhibit this type of behavior. Their approach is likely the reason they are good at learning foreign languages, but it can also cause some problems in terms of making the types of improvements that improving an IELTS score requires; thinking carefully about language is extremely useful, but obsessing about mistakes is not.

Response: When dealing with learners who exhibit the characteristics of an engineer, it can be effective to ask them about their profession or directly inquire whether they are an engineer. This can help establish their type and enable you to respond in a way that addresses their specific mindset. You can use a pre-prepared response, such as the canned response titled 'VIP engineer overanalyzing everything,' which addresses their analytical approach to language learning and provides solutions to their concerns.

When responding to their questions, it is important to provide accurate and precise information in a systematic manner that aligns with their approach to language learning. However, it is also important to remind them not to overthink or overanalyze things, as this may hinder their ability to communicate effectively in the language. Encourage them to focus on overall communication skills and fluency rather than getting caught up in minute details.

Maintain a supportive and understanding tone while guiding them towards a more balanced approach to language learning. Remind them that language is not just a system of details but also a means of communication and encourage them to practice using the language in real-life contexts.

Persona 9: Lost

Recognition: The lost type of learner is often a new student who feels overwhelmed by the amount of information in the course. They may struggle with self-directed learning and may find it challenging to navigate through the course materials, including the *Welcome Course* or study plans. They may express being overwhelmed and may require additional guidance and support.

Response: When dealing with learners who exhibit characteristics of being lost, it is important to provide clear, step-by-step instructions on how to navigate the course materials. Direct them to the walkthrough video or consider creating a personalized video for them to show them how to find the necessary resources. Be patient and understanding as they may need ongoing assistance with basic tasks, especially in the early stages of the course.

Setting them simple tasks and checking back with them once they have completed them can be helpful in keeping them on track. Encourage them to take one step at a time, focus on manageable chunks of information, and seek help whenever needed. Reassure them that it is normal to feel overwhelmed initially and that with time and practice, they will become more comfortable with the course materials.

Maintain a supportive and patient approach and emphasize the importance of asking questions and seeking help whenever needed. Encourage them to take ownership of their learning process and provide them with resources and guidance to help them gain confidence and progress in their language learning journey.

Persona 10 “Deadline Yesterday”

Recognition: This type of learner is often a student who has already registered for a language test or is planning to register for a test despite not being fully prepared. They may have a sense of urgency to finish the test due to deadlines, family pressure, or simply wanting to be done with it quickly. They may seek tips, tricks, and a fast-track plan to improve their language skills in a short period of time. They may also request immediate feedback on essays submitted just before their exam. They have likely heard from us already that these approaches do not work and end up extending the time it actually takes to pass, but they persist in their belief that such concerns do not apply to them or their particular situation.

Response: Dealing with learners who are in a hurry can be challenging as they may be resistant advice about the importance of proper preparation. It is essential to be clear and firm in your response, emphasizing that taking the test before being fully prepared may result in failure, wasting time and money, and unnecessary stress. Consider responding in a video format to provide a more personalized and detailed explanation.

Ask follow-up questions to understand why they are in a hurry, whether they understand the consequences of taking the test prematurely, and why they are determined to stick to their chosen

exam date despite the risks. Encourage them to reflect on their goals, their level of preparedness, and the importance of giving themselves enough time to adequately prepare for the test.

Provide realistic expectations about the time and effort required to improve language skills and achieve the desired score. Emphasize the importance of following the advice and guidance provided in the course, rather than relying on shortcuts or quick fixes. Encourage them to prioritize quality preparation over rushing to take the test.

Be patient and understanding but also assertive in conveying the potential consequences of taking the test hastily. Remind them that the ultimate goal is to achieve success in the test, which requires thorough preparation and readiness. Offer support and guidance, but also reinforce the importance of taking responsible and informed decisions regarding their test preparation timeline.

Persona 11: Angry, Annoyed, Entitled

Recognition: This type of learner may not be a distinct category on its own but can be observed in any of the learner types mentioned above. These learners may express frustration, annoyance, or entitlement, and may complain about not receiving satisfactory answers to their questions, feeling mistreated despite having paid for the course, demanding additional attention or face-to-face meetings, and expressing stress from various sources such as lack of progress, time constraints, family pressure, or past failures.

Response: Dealing with angry, annoyed, or entitled learners requires a careful and composed approach. It is important to stay calm, focused on the facts, and not let emotions dictate your response. Avoid confrontation or provocation and stick to the evidence and the nature of the problem being addressed. Consider responding in a video format at the first sign of dealing with this type of behavior as it allows for more personalized and less prone-to-misinterpretation communication.

Be polite, respectful, and professional in your interactions, and continue to push the facts and evidence to address their concerns. Avoid tolerating any abusive behavior, which is rare but unacceptable, and clearly communicate that rude, angry, or abusive communication is not acceptable. Encourage them to communicate in a calm and constructive manner for a more productive outcome.

If you feel overwhelmed or unable to handle the situation, do not hesitate to ask for help from your colleagues or manager, as they may provide additional support or guidance in dealing with difficult learners.

Remember to prioritize addressing their concerns while maintaining a professional demeanor, and strive to find a solution that is fair and reasonable for both parties.

A Final Note: Emails Related to Admin

Recognition: These are emails or tasks related to administrative matters such as requesting receipts, refunds, or other administrative procedures. You should not respond to these requests because these tasks can be assigned to the appropriate team member who is responsible for handling them. In some

cases, there may be specific procedures SOPs in place for handling certain administrative tasks, such as moving students from one platform to another, processing refunds, or managing testimonial requests.

Response: When dealing with administrative tasks, it is important to follow established procedures and guidelines to ensure smooth and efficient handling of the task. If there is a specific team member or department responsible for handling the issue, assign the email or task to the appropriate person, such as XXXX for refunds or XXXX for platform migration to Kajabi, as per the established protocols.

If you are responsible for handling the task, follow the relevant SOP or established procedure for that particular task. Refer to any relevant documents or guidelines that provide instructions on how to handle the specific administrative task. If there is a separate document or resource that outlines who to assign tasks to and where to find SOPs for various situations, make sure to refer to that document if you require guidance.

Ensure that all administrative tasks are handled promptly, accurately, and in accordance with the established procedures and guidelines to maintain professionalism and efficient operations.