

Tips for Communicating with Instructors

Students are often nervous or intimidated to talk with their instructors, especially when they need them the most—for extra help or a second chance. But did you know that many instructors are surprised that students feel uncomfortable approaching them? Instructors are people just like everyone else and they teach because they genuinely care about their students. So even if you feel shy, uncomfortable or embarrassed, step up to ask for help. Relax, introduce yourself and have an open conversation. Below are some strategies for meeting with your instructor.

DON'T WAIT!

Talking with your instructor sooner is better, especially if the subject is difficult for you. Deal with issues as they come up. Most problems are easier to solve early in the term and become much harder to deal with over time.

USE OFFICE HOURS

Your instructors may have office hours specifically to talk to students; they should be listed on your class syllabus. If your instructors don't have office hours, they should be happy to talk to you after class or by appointment. And don't forget that e-mail works too!

PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

If you are anxious about talking with your instructor, write down a list of your questions beforehand. Preparation will help you arrive with confidence to your meeting and will help you remember all the questions you need answered. If you are going to discuss grades, take class materials with you—your graded work, lecture notes and even your textbook.

BE SPECIFIC

Tell instructors if you are having difficulty in a class. You may think a poor grade speaks for itself but it doesn't! Be specific so your instructor can recommend strategies to help you. And don't be afraid to ask for clarification about comments your instructor has written on your assignments or tests.

BUT WHAT DO I SAY?

If you aren't sure what to ask your instructor, here are some possible conversation starters:

- Would you mind if I came by during your office hours so I can ask some questions?
- If you were a student in your class, what would *you* do to get an "A"?
- I'm not getting the kind of grades I know I can in your class; in what areas can I improve?
- Do you have suggestions about how to generate ideas for my paper in this class?
- May I ask a couple of questions about the homework assignment?
- What resources can you recommend to help me prepare for this class?
- What strategies do you recommend for getting ready for a test?

IT'S OK TO JUST SAY "HI" Most professors enjoy talking to students — it's part of the reason they got into teaching— but chances are students infrequently come by their offices. Dropping by, even just to say hello, will make you stand out in class. And that's a good thing!

Remember, your instructors were college students too! They are your best resource for becoming a successful student.