



## How to Talk to Instructors: Tips for Success



Successful students build and maintain productive relationships with academic instructors and university professionals. Successful students also communicate effectively and take responsibility for their own academic success.

**Below are a few tips on communicating with instructors.**

**Introduce yourself!** Before you start talking, say, “Hi, I’m \_\_\_\_\_ from your \_\_\_\_\_ class.”

**Be respectful.** Unless your instructor indicates otherwise, it is always best to address an instructor or university professional by their title: Professor, Dr., Ms., Mrs., Mr., etc. Ask politely for an opportunity to speak with the instructor at their convenience. Always address the instructor at the beginning of an email with “Dear...” and/or their preferred title and name. Remember to turn off your cell phone when you meet face-to-face, and that basic manners (please and thank you) can go a long way!

**Be specific.** Instructors interact with dozens of students every day. It is important that you continue to restate your name, your PID (in emails), and keep your communication specific and concise in order to help them remember you and focus on your individual needs.

Communicate specific concerns (i.e. indicate that you are having trouble understanding a specific assignment, state why, and what you have done to try to understand the assignment on your own). Avoid saying you don’t understand the subject or topic in general. Also, ask for strategies that will help you prepare for class and perform well on assignments and tests.

**Be prepared.** Try to find the answers to academic questions on your own before asking the instructor. Often, the answer is already in your textbook or class materials.

If you are having trouble understanding a concept or formula, bring your textbook, problem set, and/or syllabus to show the instructor an example of exactly what is giving you trouble.

If you are having trouble with several issues, bring a list to your meeting to be sure you cover all topics of concern. It may also write down your questions and read over them before the meeting.

**Ask what you can do to improve.** There is a big difference between asking what you can do to increase your grade in the class and asking how you can better understand the course material. It is best to focus your questions on ways to enhance learning, and the grade will follow.

When you ask what you can do to improve, write down the professor’s suggestions and follow through on them. If the suggestions work well for you, send a “thank you” note to the instructor. They really like to hear when their advice works and it helps in providing advice to others.

**Go to office hours.** An instructor’s office hours are usually included on the class syllabus and posted on their office door. Even in very large classes, aside from just prior to major exams, instructors tend to have very few visitors during office hours. If the posted hours don’t work for your schedule, politely email to ask if it is possible to meet another time.