

Tips on Communication with a Professor

Step 1: Identifying Reasons for Seeking Help

There are many different reasons for why a student may need to talk with a professor or a teaching assistant. You may have done poorly on an exam or assignment, you are unclear on an assignment or material discussed in class, or you are looking for a letter of recommendation for graduate school or a job. Once you have determined the reason why you are seeking help you can make steps to meet.

Step 2: Determining When to Meet

Once you have identified the specific reason or reasons you need or want to speak with your professor, determine how soon you need to talk to them. Depending on the reason in which you need to speak with your professor will give you an idea of the best way to contact them. If it is urgent call them, send them an email or arrange a face-to face. If it is not urgent email them or talk to them during their office hours.

When contacting your professor make sure you are call them by their correct title, most professors will let you know how they would like to be addressed. If you are unsure address them as “Professor [last name].”

If you are writing an email, in the subject line put your class number (i.e. Psy 3660), professors usually teach more than one course and this can help them to identify which homework assignment, exam or class you are referring to.

Be sure to ask if this is a good time to approach the professor for your specific need. Also, keep in mind that a professor is typically less receptive to answering questions immediately before an exam is being distributed.

If you have questions or concerns stop by the professor’s office hours. Check your syllabus for office hours and policies. If you are unable to make it to the scheduled office hours, email your professor to arrange a meeting time.

Step 3: Organizing Your Talk with Your Professor

Arrive prepared with your list of why you need to approach your professor for help. Any anxiety you may experience can be lessened if you are organized beforehand.

Make sure to write all your questions or concerns down before your meeting. This will minimize any chance of forgetting to ask a particular question of importance to you. Come prepared with paper and pen. It is best to record all information provided from your professor rather than rely later on your memory. Avoid using your laptop/tablet, they can be time consuming or not function properly during your meeting. You can always record it digitally at a later time.

If you have a question on/about an exam, bring the exam along to save time in explanations. If you have a question about class material it is strongly advised to have your text, class notes and syllabus with you (in case you need to refer to such).

Step 4: Talking with Your Professor

Know your professor's last name and use it with his/her appropriate title. Do not assume an informal greeting unless the professor has specifically stated that a more casual greeting is preferred.

Be sure to arrive on time and be mindful of possible (and likely) time constraints. Don't hesitate in asking to meet again if you did not receive all the information you needed. You can additionally ask your professor for additional resources they may know of to help in your learning experience, such as a tutor, study group or one of the learning centers.

*Retrieved from <https://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/How-to-Approach-a-Professor-for-Help.aspx>