

## How to Talk to Your Professor



Let's face it: talking to your professors can seem daunting. Not only do many of them have PhDs, but they also determine your final grade for the course. However, professors can be very helpful throughout your college experience. They can provide assistance in the areas of research, scholarships, internships, grad schools, and future careers.

### Consider visiting your professor...

- When you need clarification on an assignment, policies, and/or schedules
- When you're not getting the grades you know you're capable of
- When you want feedback on a draft
- When you have questions about a specific grade you've received
- When you would like advice on the subject of your major

### Tips for a Successful Visit

**1. Find out how your professor would like to be addressed.** Some professors prefer to be called by their first names, while others expect to be called "Doctor --." However, not all professors have their PhDs. Take the guesswork out of the equation, and ask your professor what he/she would like to be called.

**2. Visit your professor during his/her office hours.** Professors use their office hours to review student work, conduct research, and prepare lessons. Therefore, it is always a good idea to schedule an appointment. If you are unavailable during their office hours, contact your professor to see if he/she would be willing to meet with you at a time that is mutually convenient.



**3. Be on time for your appointment.** It is generally a good idea to show up a few minutes early for your appointment. In the event that he/she is late (or misses the appointment altogether), wait a few minutes, and then leave the professor a brief note. If you are unable to keep the appointment, contact the professor in advance to see if it can be re-scheduled.

### 4. Bring a positive attitude.

Be aware of the emotions you bring to the appointment. Being defensive is a sure-fire way to undermine your professor's willingness to help. Keep in mind that college professors aren't "out to get you." Tell yourself, "He can't do my work, but he can point me in the right direction." Or, "She can suggest study techniques so I can do better on tests." Don't forget that college professors have invested much time and energy into becoming an expert in their respective fields. Act respectfully towards them and, more often than not, they will be delighted to help you.

### 5. Have specific things to discuss with your professor

a.) Questions about course topics – Bring any research or other attempts you've made to understand the course content. This will save time in the meeting. Also, it will show your professor that you've made attempts and are serious about learning.



b.) Needing extra help – If you’ve studied hard yet but are still failing exams, schedule some time to talk to your professor. He/she may be able to address specific issues or provide useful insight as to how you may improve your grade.

c.) Appealing a grade – When questioning test materials, grades, etc. bring as much proof as possible to the meeting (e.g. notes, textbook, etc.). Without such evidence, your professor may not take your request seriously.

d.) Considering a major or career in your professor’s field – Prior to making this type of appointment, talk with your professor to make your intentions clear. Some professors may not be comfortable offering general academic or career guidance.

e.) Help with writing assignments – Have an idea of where you are in the writing process and what specific help you might need. For example, do you understand the assignment? Are you answering the question(s)? Is the paper structured logically? Does your paper have transitions and flow smoothly? How are your mechanics? Your professor will be able to give you guidance in all of these areas.

## **6. Be prepared.**

It is always a good idea to bring your class notes, textbook(s) and any other relevant class materials to the appointment. This shows your professor that you respect his/her time and that you are sincere about getting help. It may be helpful to write down specific questions prior to the meeting. Likewise, it may be necessary for you to take notes during the appointment.

Be up-front with your professor. Remember: many professors entered into education because they enjoy developing relationships with their students. So lighten up, and be confident in yourself. Chances are you will be glad you asked for help.

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*The following resource was used in the design of this handout.*

“How to Talk to Your Professor.” Western Oregon University. Web. 10 December 2009.  
[www.wou.edu/provost/aalc/learning/documents/HowToTalkToYourProfessor.pdf](http://www.wou.edu/provost/aalc/learning/documents/HowToTalkToYourProfessor.pdf).

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