



Tips on Reaching Out to Your Professor

Why should you reach out to your professor?

- You might want to reach out to your professor for many reasons. Some of these reasons include:
 - To discuss class material that is interesting to you
 - To receive help with class material that is confusing or difficult
 - To ask questions about the class
 - To discuss your grades on homework assignments and exams
 - To find out ways to improve your performance in the class
 - To develop a mentoring relationship and have a professional reference for future recommendation letters (especially if the professor is in the field you are majoring in)

Talking to your professor

- Address professors as Dr. followed by his or her last name, unless she or he specifically requests to be called by a different name or title.
- While not all lecturers in college classrooms are professors (for example, some instructors may be graduate students), if you are unsure whether your instructor is a professor, err on the side of caution and call him or her by Dr. It is better to be flattering than to understate his or her training!
- Be respectful.
- Professors are people, too! They will typically be interested in the courses they are teaching and thus welcome dialogue with students.
- Try to ask questions that **are not on the syllabus**. Professors invest a lot of time and effort into creating the syllabus for the class. They may not be as receptive if you frequently ask questions that are already answered clearly in the syllabus.

Establishing Contact

In class

- If you need to talk briefly with your professor, a convenient time is before or after class.
- Before class, professors may have time between setting up and lecturing to talk to students.
- Many professors also stay after class in order to answer questions that students may have.
 - This is an excellent time to approach the professor and introduce yourself. However, if you are looking for more than a greeting and handshake as a means of introduction, you can either take note of something that interests you during the

lecture or come up with a question to ask about the material or the course. When you approach the professor, introduce yourself first and then proceed to ask the professor a question or mention the point that you found interesting.

Outside of class

- If you need to talk with your professors for a longer period, professors also typically have office hours or are available by appointment to meet with you. Their office hours will typically be listed on the syllabus. Office hours are times professors set aside in order to provide students with an opportunity to come by to introduce themselves, ask questions about the class or talk about class material. So, don't hesitate to stop by and ask questions. It may also help to email the professor before stopping by during office hours to let him or her know that you plan on stopping by and what you are interested in discussing. This may ease the interaction because the professor knows to expect you and can be prepared. Also, it puts less pressure on you to facilitate the interaction.
- If you stop by a professor's office when it is **not** during office hours, **do not** assume that they are not busy. They may have time to meet with you, but be sure to ask.
- If you are unavailable to meet during the professor's office hours, professors can usually schedule an appointment with you. When scheduling an appointment, try to offer several possible dates for meeting, as professors often have many time commitments. A suggestion would be asking to meet in the next week or the next few days and then let the professor narrow it down further by saying which dates she or he is available.
- If you schedule an appointment to meet with the professor, make sure that you are on time. If you are unable to keep the appointment, email or telephone the professor to inform him or her, giving as much advance notice as possible.

Emailing Professors

- In the beginning of your email, you should address the professor by Dr. or Professor and his or her last name. The next part of the email should include your name and the name of the class and class section you are in. This will help the professor know who you are and provide a frame of reference for whatever questions you may have.
- When emailing professors, use complete sentences, proper punctuation, correct grammar and respectful and appropriate language. Do not use texting language. Be respectful and don't treat your email to a professor as though it is a text message written to friends.
- Again, before asking questions, read through the syllabus and see if it answers any of your questions.

Interacting with Teaching Assistants (TAs)

- Many of your larger classes will have teaching assistants (TAs). TAs are graduate students who provide assistance to the professors in a variety of ways. Although TAs are graduate students and not yet professors, many of these tips still apply when interacting with TAs, such as using professional language (not texting language) in emails.
- Address TAs by the name they used when they were first introduced to the class.
- TAs are a great resource if you would like to discuss something about the class.

Navigating Conflicts

- Professors typically try to accommodate their students, but they still have an obligation to maintain fairness with other students when making exceptions about attendance, assignments and so forth.
- If you know you will need to miss class, approach the professor about it early on and explain the reason. This will ensure that you are on the same page, and it is also courteous.*
- If you are having difficulty with a class (such as problems meeting the deadline for an assignment), be sure to email or meet with the professor and explain the situation. Do not hesitate to ask professors for assistance with a class ... they are here to help!

Going Above and Beyond

- If you are interested in standing out and building strong relationships with professors, you can take these additional steps:
 - Sit near the front of the room and pay attention during class.*
 - Participate. Show that you are interested in the material and invested in the class.*
 - Ask questions if you are confused or interested in learning more about a topic.
 - Take advantage of the resources offered on campus, such as tutoring centers.

Additional Resources

- <https://www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/resources/students/faculty-relationships.shtml>
- *<http://ssd.umich.edu/article/seven-tips-building-strong-working-relationships>
- <http://www.thecampuscompanion.com/2012/12/11/profs/#.UpKER8TrzKg>
- <http://talk.collegeconfidential.com/graduate-school/1158973-how-build-relationship-my-professors.html>
- <https://signededucation.com/blog/managing-relationships-with-professors>
- <http://www.askanadvisor.org/2011/03/how-to-build-relationships-with.html>

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