

Getting Along With Instructors

STUDENTS AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY have a variety of resources available to help them succeed in college. Yet, one of the more obvious resources available to students is often overlooked - professors and instructors. The following information is meant to help you work with your professors and instructors to ensure your success.



WHAT DO MY PROFESSORS EXPECT FROM ME?

Think about people you've met. Some had qualities and characteristics that helped you want to get to know them better. Others had characteristics that resulted in your feeling relieved to see them go. It is no different with professors. They may meet and interact with up to 600 or more students each year! Your behavior will determine if their reaction to you is positive or negative.

DON'T	DO
..ask questions that show you haven't done the assigned reading or that you haven't been listening to the lecture.	..come prepared to class and/or to the instructor's office during office hours. If you have missed class, get the lecture notes from another student before you ask questions.
..ask general questions such as "Could you explain Chapter 3?"	..take the trouble to read the chapter and ask specific questions about concepts that are giving you trouble.
..ask personal questions during class, such as "When can I take my makeup exam?"	.. ask personal questions of the instructor during office hours.
.. ask during class for any handouts that you missed because of an absence.	..find out from the classmates what handouts were distributed, ask for their copies, and then photocopy them for yourself or download them from the course website.
.. expect the instructor to accept your excuses for turning in late assignments if you do so too often.	.. turn in assignments on time. Instructors are not likely to accept your excuses more than once or twice. They've heard them all before.
..offend your instructor. Falling asleep or reading during a lecture, consistently coming late to or leaving early from class, and talking to a classmate are insulting and offensive to an instructor.	.. act respectfully and courteously. Come to class on time; leave when the class is over. If you are too tired to stay awake, don't attend class. If you have to study for another class/test, don't come to class. If you are discourteous in class, instructors will be much less likely to go out of their way to help you. Put yourself in their position, and imagine what it is like to stand in front of a group of 100-200 students who are sleeping, talking, or otherwise uninvolved in the class.

HOW DO I TALK TO MY PROFESSOR?

Many students find they are anxious and tongue-tied when needing to talk with a professor. Here are some suggestions about how to talk with your instructor.

1. **Schedule an appointment** to see your instructor during his/her office hours. **REMEMBER:** your instructor also uses his/her office time to grade papers, prepare classes, and conduct research. "Dropping in" usually results in the student feeling frustrated or irritated because the professor already has appointments scheduled.



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2. **Ask your professor how he/she prefers to be addressed.** Not all instructors are Ph.D.'s (i.e., "Dr."), and thus may want to be addressed by their first names. But, check it out to be sure.
3. **Be on time for office appointments.** If you do show up on time and your professor isn't there, wait five or ten minutes (you'd wait longer in a physician's office), then leave a note. If you miss an appointment, apologize in person and reschedule.

MORE TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR PROFESSOR

- **Adopt the attitude that your professor wants to help you.** Eliminate negative thoughts such as: "She'll just tell me it's my fault." "He requires too much work." "She uses trick questions on the test." Instead, tell yourself "He can't solve my problem for me, but he can help me figure out what I can do." "She can help me understand how to study for her tests so I can do better."
- **Be prepared for the meeting.** Know exactly what you want from your professor. Write out what your problem is and what you want from your professor. Come up with options BEFORE you meet with your professor. Then he/she can help you decide if those options are possible.
- **Questions about course content.** Be specific when you meet with your instructor. Examples of appropriate questions are: "I read chapter 3 and reviewed my notes on the inverse relationship between price and quantity demanded. But I need some more help finding practical examples of how this fits into a market pricing strategy."

"I really want to learn how to use this concept mapping technique for my persuasive writing assignment. I used it to outline my ideas, but they still seem disorganized and unclear. What suggestions do you have that can help me use this technique better?" (Show instructor your notes.)

- **Needing additional help.** Professors are the best source of advice for how to succeed in their classes. If you are investing sufficient study time and still not doing well, schedule an office appointment. Be honest and communicate non-defensively. Let your professor know what you are already doing (how many hours you spend reading, reviewing notes, studying with other students, etc.). Discuss your specific concerns ("I can get the right answer but not when I use the method shown in class"; "I do okay on the quizzes but seem to blank on the tests"; "I do the reading before each class but I'm having difficulty connecting it with the information in the lecture", etc.) Ask the instructor what else you can do to succeed in their class.
- **Appealing a poor grade.** If you are appealing a poor grade, come prepared with ideas of extra work you are prepared to do: "I am really concerned about my grade in this course. I know I am responsible for my grades, but I would really like another opportunity to improve my grade in this class. Would you be willing to give me extra credit if I did a 5-10 page research paper on the health care crisis in the U.S.?"
- **Concerns about tests.** Remember, do not be defensive or hostile toward the instructor. Accept responsibility and ask for advice on how to improve. "I am really upset about my performance on the last test. I studied two hours a night for a week before the test and reviewed all the readings and notes with a study partner. But, when it came time to take the test, none of the questions seemed to be related to the material I studied. I want to do better on your tests. Can you give me some suggestions?"
- **Asking for an incomplete grade or other special exceptions.** The most important thing to remember is that students who have valid reasons and the proper attitude will have fewer problems receiving extra time to complete work or getting other special exceptions. Make sure that you are very clear with the instructor, and be honest.