

"What's Up, Doc?"

Tips for Talking With Professors



If you experience frustrations or confusions in certain classes, remember that your professors will neither know nor understand what they are unless you articulate them clearly. Taking the time to talk to your professors can not only serve to provide you with insights, but will send a message to your professor that you care about the course—which professors REALLY appreciate. **You should meet with each of your professors at least 3 times a semester to show your commitment and to ask questions that can better help you understand the material.**

The following are some suggestions that should help you more effectively interact with your professors.

- A. **Let them know to expect you.** Even if you're going during office hours, some professors prefer to know who's coming when. If you have class during office hours, request another time. Be sure your emails start with "Dear Professor X" and use respectful, full sentences. Proofread before sending!
- B. **Organize questions to ask the professor before you go.** Make your questions as specific as possible so you receive the answers you need. For example...

AVOID General Statements/ Questions	MAKE Specific Statements/Questions
I don't understand the material you went over in class.	I don't understand how to apply the theory you talked about in class today. Could you please show me?
I don't understand why I received such a low grade on my paper.	I saw that you wrote that my thesis development was poor, but I'm not sure precisely what you were looking for. Could you show me where I went wrong (and what you'd like me to focus on for the next paper)?
The material in this chapter doesn't make any sense to me.	I don't understand what the author means by "economic downsizing in the 21 st century." Could you clarify that for me with examples?

- C. **Don't ask professors for things that you could easily find out on your own** (such as due dates printed in the syllabus, or definitions of words—unless you need help with the definitions!)
- D. **Diplomatically present what wasn't clear.** Your professors benefit from students asking questions about that which that wasn't clear. It serves as feedback that may improve the quality of future classes.
- E. **Be specific and engaged**, and your professors will reward you with information and illumination...and they'll note your effort, too!

