

# Tips for Talking with Professors/Faculty Advisors

Depending on the size of your class, it may be fruitful to introduce yourself and which course section you are enrolled. Some professors have over 100 students they teach in the semester. Be aware that they may not know your name until you introduce yourself and remind them by frequent visits (repeated introductions). BE BRAVE and make yourself known!

## Introduction

Dr. XXX, my name is [first name][last name] and I am in your [name of class i.e Success in College and Life, philosophy, history, math etc] in the [day & time], [section xx]. I have a few questions about the material. Would you have a few minutes to clarify some things for me?

## Social visit – get to know your professor questions.

1. Do you have a favorite topic you like to teach in this course? What is your least favorite topic to teach in this course?
2. What do you like most about the textbook that was selected for the course? Do you have any pointers about how to gain the most out of it (other than just reading it☺)?
3. Do you have any research interests that you'll be sharing during the run of the course?
4. How long have you been teaching the course?
5. What do you think is the most difficult concept for students to learn in this course?

## Academic or Course Specific visit – get clarification and academic assistance

*Be prepared before going to visit your professor! Go to office hours with specific questions about assignments (do some homework problems before you go and identify the specific areas you need clarification on the concepts).*

*Bring your notes, textbook, homework problems and your questions (in writing).*

1. Dr. XXXX, I've done some of the homework set and have some specific questions. Could you clarify some things for me?
2. I am not sure I understand the concept you spoke about in lecture yesterday. The book is also confusing me. Would you clarify some things for me?
3. I don't understand how to submit my homework on Moodle or how to look up my grade in the system? Could you guide me through it?
4. I missed your last lecture and have asked for notes from a friend, but I have some questions to make sure I understand the concept you lectured on.
6. Could you give me some pointers about how to organize the information that we are learning in class? My notes sometimes are confusing. Would you look at my diagrams/notes and offer some suggestions?
7. What are the resources for any assistance in this course (outside your office hours)?
8. Do you have Supplemental Instruction available for this course? Is there tutoring available?

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**Academic Success or Career Guidance – get insight from professors/Faculty Advisors about possible classes and careers or gain approval for major support electives for your degree plan**

1. I've really enjoyed this class and would like to identify future courses for my major. What courses would you recommend?
2. I'm exploring majors and would like to find out your experience in this field. Can you give any pointers about how to gain experience in this area? Do you know what the job outlook is in this field?
3. I've reviewed some of the major elective support courses for my major that require faculty advisor approval. I would like to talk with you about which would be most appropriate for my goals.
4. I'd like to get a minor in this subject. Do you know who I would need to visit to do that? Do you think this subject as a minor could enhance my competitiveness in the field? In what ways?
5. There was a topic in class that sparked my interest as a possible career. I wanted to ask you if you had any experience or colleagues in the field that I could contact for an informational interview.

## **Following up about results of a test**

1. I was surprised at the results of my test and would like to ask for some clarification. (Do not sound accusatory, rather, sound inquisitive and be open to what s/he says!)
2. I found a few questions on my exam that I thought (and still think) they are correct. I'd like to ask for your assistance in understanding them or perhaps determining if my answers are indeed correct.
3. I've reviewed these questions I had incorrect on the exam but I am still confused in some areas. Would you explain them to me again?

## **Follow-up with your professor**

If you made a commitment to return, then do it! Ask if you can email questions and if so, email a 'thank you for meeting with me' note to your professor and SIGN your email so s/he sees your name in writing! All this helps in your professor getting to know you and building an interest in your academic success! Here is an example email thank you note.

Dear Dr. XXX,

Thank you for taking the time to further explain the concepts to me today. I believe I have a better understanding of what we talked about. I may need further assistance and hope you will be open to another visit during your office hours. I appreciate your help and look forward to a great learning experience in your class.

Thank you,

OCCC Power Now Student

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## Other resources about talking to professors:

- From Dustin Wax on Lifehack: <http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/advice-for-students-how-to-talk-to-professors.html>. Call them by the right title; Tell the truth; Be prepared to do the work; Be clear and concise; Pay social calls; Prepare for disappointment; Hold the threats.
- “How to Befriend a Professor” [wikiHow](http://www.wikihow.com/Befriend-a-Professor). 2009, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. March 17 2010 <<http://www.wikihow.com/Befriend-a-Professor>>

## Other considerations:

- If your professor announces an event in class, make a good effort to attend. Professors select topics that they believe will benefit you most! Plus, it is good ‘small talk’ topic to use when you visit with your professor.
- READ your professor’s syllabus thoroughly. They put a lot of time and thought into it. If they recognize that you have read it, you’ve demonstrated that you value them and their work!
- Identify when your professor has office hours and their preferred way of communication i.e. phone, email, or office visit. Use the method of preference if at all possible.
- To effectively confront your professor, you have to be polite. Use kind words to explain your situation and be aware of your tone of voice and body language. When you speak to a professor, use I statements. An I statement is when you state a problem or a question using the word I, not the word you. Here are some examples:

<b>I statement (Good)</b>	<b>You statement (Not so good)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am having trouble keeping up during lecture.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You go too fast when you lecture.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I am not sure I am studying the correct material.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You aren’t making it clear what is important.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I want to do better on the next test, so I would like to understand why I missed points on these questions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Why did you take off points on these questions?</li></ul>

Always thank the professor for his or her time and express any gratitude that you feel is appropriate for the specific help that he or she has provided. This rapport will leave the door open for future appointments. (Veal, Tamekia, 2010 Trio Student Support Services Handout: “Tips and Reminders on How to Talk With Your Professor”, University College, Illinois State University. [tyveal@ilstu.edu](mailto:tyveal@ilstu.edu)).