



How to Approach Faculty for Help

Do you have difficulty asking for help or seeking advice from your professor or teaching assistant? If you do, you're not alone. Some professors can seem unapproachable and it can be frustrating to try and catch them. So here is what you can do about it and why it is worth your effort.

What's in it for me?

If you make an effort to get to know your professors, they may be willing to help you with class materials, and to provide guidance in the future. Many professors can advise you on courses to take, experience-gaining opportunities, or even jobs. If you are planning to go on to graduate school, the relationships you build with the faculty will help you to get important letters of reference, helpful tips, and other assistance.

Rules of thumb

Professors and their teaching assistants have office hours. Be sure you check the class syllabus or class website for office hours. If the professor requires that you call and make an appointment, do it.

If you are having difficulty in class:

- Remember that your professor has an interest in your performing well and is there to help you. Approach your professor with respect, and she or he will reciprocate. If you have scheduled an appointment, be on time. If you can't keep your appointment, call and reschedule it.
- Don't worry about asking your professor for help; professors would rather you ask for help than to fall behind in their classes.
- Be specific about what you are having difficulty with. For example, "I don't understand the implications of the Franco-Prussian War on modern European history" will be more likely to help your professor to guide you than, "I am lost in class."
- Be polite and patient, but also be assertive if you don't feel like you've gotten an answer to your question(s). Try to summarize the response and repeat it back so that the professor can help you with concepts that are unclear to you. For additional help, refer to "Improving My Listening Skills."
- If you took a test and are not sure why you got the grade you received, do not be confrontational. Calmly discuss the questions that concern you and your reasoning for your response. If you have a tough time with this, you might want to read "Resolving Conflicts or Arguments."