

Working With Your Instructor

How to get along with your Instructors

- Go to Class. Regular attendance is important not only for good relations with the instructor, but also for ensuring that you do not miss anything. Instructors may say they do not care about class attendance. Do not believe it. They notice who is there and who is not.
- Do not be late. The first minutes of class are often used for communication of vital announcements, such as upcoming tests, due dates for assignments, change in class location, etc.
- If an emergency arises that causes you to miss class, be sure to get notes from someone in the class whose work you respect. At the next class meeting after your absence, tell the instructor you have gotten the notes, but that you want to double-check to make sure you did not miss any announcements of upcoming tests, etc. Do not dwell on the reason for your absence. The instructor has probably heard it before.
- Sit toward the front of the class and pay attention. There is a strange but definite relationship between your distance from the instructor and your distance from an "A". Regardless of how dry a lecture may be there is always something communicated for which you will be responsible for knowing.
- Always bring a notebook, textbook and writing instrument to class. This communicates preparedness and interest, even if neither of these qualities applies to you.
- Instructors announce office hours in the course syllabus. It is an advantage to know your instructors and for them to know you. Appointments may be made before or after class or over the telephone. If for some reason you must cancel, be sure to call! Remember, teaching is not your instructor's only responsibility. Do not expect that your instructor will always be available at your convenience.
- The purpose of meeting with your instructor, regardless of your level of interest in the course, is to enhance your understanding of what is going on in class. Before your appointment, be sure you have:
 - Previewed your text to familiarize yourself with topics for the remainder of the course.
 - Reviewed your notes up to that point and identified topics or issues that you do not understand.

- Wrote down at least three or four good questions about the course, such as potential topics for papers or projects, questions about the most effective ways to study the material, etc.
 - Located the instructor's office so that you will not be late for the appointment due to wandering around the halls at the last minute.
 - Made sure you know the instructor's title (Dr., Mr., Mrs., or Ms.) and how to pronounce the instructor's name.
- Getting to know instructors can have other benefits as well. Most of them are interesting people, knowledgeable about many topics beyond your own discipline. You may also find that a particular field is much more interesting than you previously thought. It is not unusual for decisions about college majors and career goals to originate with a good student-instructor relationship. Also, instructors may have information about special opportunities that you may find useful. Internships, competitive awards, and employment opportunities are usually posted on cluttered bulletin boards and are sometimes hard to spot. An instructor who knows you may be the key to your becoming aware of these special opportunities. A single office visit will not change your life, but it could lead eventually to many "fringe" benefits that would not have come your way if you had not gotten to know your instructors.
 - Get assignments in on time. Earthquake, fire, flood and catastrophic illness are the only excuses for turning assignments in late. You have got 24 hours in your day just like everyone else. You want the instructor to know who you are for the right reasons. There is a definite relationship between students who do poorly on tests, receive low final grades, or fail courses and those who turn assignments in late.
 - Being courteous in class does not mean you have to agree with everything that is being said. When asking questions, do not be hostile or demanding and do not back the instructor into a corner. When you disagree or do not understand a point, be positive, preface your questions with leads like "Could you clarify the relationship between...?" or "Could you elaborate on...?" Avoid negative leads like "I don't see how..." or "Don't you think...?"
 - Grades are another area in which instructors and students sometimes disagree. Never discuss a grade when you are angry. Be specific but courteous when making your points.
 - Give constructive feedback when asked. Improved teaching often depends on the kind of feedback they receive from students. Avoid being negative in your comments. Specific, positive, constructive feedback can really improve the learning situation.