

## Communicating with Professors: Ten Practical Suggestions

As a college student, effectively communicating with professors is essential. This handout presents ten practical suggestions to assist you in developing a personal connection with your professor.

- 1. Stay focused and ask questions.** Pay attention in class, to the syllabus, and to Canvas. Professors have different ways of managing their courses. Be as aware as possible of any expectations in advance. This will prepare you to interact with instructors in a clear, meaningful way. Additionally, although it can be intimidating for students in a new environment, know that faculty expect students to ask questions.
- 2. Narrow down why you want or need to talk with your professor, and consider the “right” time to do so.** Are you wanting further clarification on a class concept? Are you concerned about your grade? Are you needing guidance or an extension on an assignment? Are you wanting to inform your professor of a personal issue? Are you in need of a professional reference or letter of recommendation? Have a specific communication plan and/or purpose in place prior to opening up a conversation. Additionally, avoid trying to utilize short, in-class breaks for questions that need more time, and be mindful that many faculty teach back-to-back and cannot always meet with you after class. Prioritize scheduled Office Hours as the opportunity to connect whenever possible. *Consider utilizing The Learning Center’s “Preparing for Office Hours” worksheet.*
- 3. Inform the professor of your purpose and availability in advance.** After you have narrowed down what it is that you are wanting or needing to discuss, include the topic(s) and the days/times you are available in your request to the professor. This will avoid back-and-forth on email and can assist the professor in preparing any necessary materials or information to maximize your time together.
- 4. Check in regularly versus only in extreme cases.** Take advantage of in-person opportunities (i.e. Office Hours or review sessions) to clarify course content or to receive indications of what will be on an exam or part of a future assignment. Your professor and/or Teaching Assistant (TA) commonly provides these opportunities throughout the semester. Consistent communication oftentimes improves your overall communication. However, refrain from emailing your professor about things you can look up on your own (see suggestion #1!).

5. **Introduce yourself before or after class in the first week and/or aim to meet at least once with your professor prior to the midpoint of the semester.** This makes it more likely that you can develop a personal connection gradually (or proactively) versus waiting to correspond as a response to an extenuating circumstance. Confirm or learn your standing in the course (in terms of grades) as early as possible.
6. **Be accountable.** Ultimately, your success in your course is up to you. The syllabus has likely outlined expectations and professors see you on a weekly basis to communicate key information. Approaching your professor with a sense of responsibility is important.
7. **Aim to be professional in both electronic and in-person interactions.** Even in a casual professor-student environment, be clear, direct, and sincere in all interactions. Introduce (or reintroduce) yourself, including the specific course and section you are enrolled in. Make eye contact during in-person meetings. Additionally, it is more likely to have a personal connection if you have not communicated with your professor *solely* over email.
8. **Listen before you respond.** Since you have prepared for your meeting, it is likely that you will have many thoughts to share. Make sure to be an active listener and respond in an intentional way. This can improve your synthesis of information shared as well as the overall outcome.
9. **Express gratitude.** Most professors have a multitude of students and limited time. Let them know you value their time and appreciate the opportunity to connect.
10. **Ask for help and use your resources.** Course-specific assistance is provided by Peer Leaders (fellow students) through the Learning, Writing, and Speaking Centers (LWSC): <https://myusf.usfca.edu/lwsc>. If extra guidance is needed, you might also consider reaching out to your Faculty Advisor through your major department, your Academic Success Coach in the Center for Academic and Student Achievement, and/or your Disability Specialist in Student Disability Services.