How to Talk to Your Professors

Talking to your professor can sometimes feel like an overwhelming task. Here are a few thoughts and considerations that can help you feel comfortable and confident in approaching your professors:

- **Think clearly about your goal.** What are you trying to accomplish? What are you asking for from your professor? (Examples: assistance understanding a concept, permission to turn a paper in late; explaining why you have not been in class)
- **Think through how to convey your message clearly.** Think about what forms of communication you would feel most comfortable using. (For instance, some people find it easier to initially make contact by e-mail)
- **Don’t make assumptions about how your professor will react.** Sometimes anticipating criticism can get in the way of taking the steps you need to reach your goal.
- **Remember that we all tend to react better to requests than demands.** Remember, your professor does not owe it to you to meet you request.
- **Think ahead and offer to obtain supporting documentation.** If you need to be out of town for an event, offer to bring the program back with you.
- **Focus on trying to accomplish your goal, rather than how your professor may be evaluating you.** Attend to the help you need from your professor in order to move forward, rather than worrying that your professor will be disapproving.
- **Don’t fail to act just because you feel nervous or uncomfortable.** Find ways to manage your stress and think of this as an opportunity to learn to handle stress.
- **Don’t assume if a professor makes an exception for you that you can count on future exceptions.** Rather, learn from this experience to handle future demands differently.
- **Think of your professor?’s office hours as a resource.** Utilize office hours early in the semester, even if there is no problem; form relationships with your professors to support your academic goals.

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