**How to Approach Professors, Instructors, and TAs**

Many students feel nervous about approaching their professors, instructors and/or TAs for help, clarification, or feedback on their assignments. Remember that your professors have an interest in your success in the class and that they are there to help you. Asking for help when you need it is a sign of strength – you’ve identified that you need some assistance and are taking steps to get it.

Not sure why you would need to speak with your professor, instructor or TA outside of class time? Here are some reasons that explain why and how you should make use of their office hours:

**To succeed in your course**

* + Your professors, instructors and TAs will be reading your work to evaluate your success in the course. They are therefore your best resource for finding out more about assignment expectations.
  + If you want clarification on a topic, they will be able to explain it from another angle so that you can understand it better.

Looking for another place to get feedback on your written work? Check out the UBC Writing Centre’s free tutorial service (**and link to the Student Resources section of our site too, Anita**): <http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/tutoring-studying/improve-your-writing/>.

* + Why wait until your paper or assignment has been marked to get feedback? Bringing in a draft and getting feedback in person can greatly improve your final product. Be sure to ask him or her if this is ok. While most will welcome the opportunity to provide you with feedback, some may not be able to read your entire draft.

**You may need academic references in the future**

* + Applications for many things, including further schooling, university-related jobs, or funding applications require references. It’s difficult to ask for a reference from someone you have never met nor spoken to! If you develop a professional relationship with your professor/instructor they will be better equipped to tell employers about your strengths.
  + Professors, instructors and/or TAs might also be able to point you towards opportunities in a field you’re interested in.

**Tips to ensure you have a positive interaction with your professor, instructor or TA**

**Talk to them early**

* + Don’t wait until the day before the exam or assignment deadline to ask for help. The earlier you speak to your professor, the more they can help you, and the more they will want to – asking for guidance about an assignment that makes up a significant part of your class grade the night before it is due does not suggest you have given much thought to it (when in fact you might have done); in contrast, asking for guidance three weeks beforehand implies you are keen to devote time to the task and do a good job.

**Be prepared and specific**

* + What do you need help with? Arrive with a list of questions or areas with which you need some help. Bring your class notes and the course syllabus with you as well.
  + Bring a specific question. This will get you better results than a more general “I need help.” Make sure that the answer to the question isn’t something that would be easily answered by reading the syllabus or course materials.
  + If you have questions about feedback, bring the assignment you have questions about and calmly discuss your reasoning for your answers or the way you approached the assignment. Receiving detailed feedback and an explanation for the way your work has been graded will help you improve your work for the next assignment.

**Take responsibility**

* + Don’t make excuses for not doing as well as you want to. Focus on what you can do to improve and what kind of support or information you need to do so.

**Act professionally**

* + Be on time when you have an appointment (not too early, and definitely not late). If you are attending office hours, arrive when there is enough time in the appointment block to deal with your question(s).
  + Respect the form of contact your professor has asked for and follow the contact instructions on the course syllabus.
  + Be polite but assertive. There is absolutely nothing to gain by threatening your professor, instructor or TA, or by being unreasonably combative. However, make sure you get what you need from the interaction – if you have come for additional guidelines or explanation of feedback on a prior assignment but do not feel that you have received these things, ask again (tell your professor, instructor or TA that you are still confused).

**Do not be offended or upset and seek advice elsewhere as well**

* + Use any comments to help gain insight into a topic or a strategy for learning, but don’t hesitate to use the other support services available on campus as well. They are there to help you!
  + Your university career is about academic and intellectual growth, self-exploration, and inquiry. The skills you learn now (including learning to ask for help) will only help you in the future.
* **And, lastly…**

**Listen to feedback and apply it in future work**

* Bear in mind that it is very frustrating as a professor, instructor or TA to take the time to provide useful feedback and guidance if the student who receives it then chooses to ignore it! Try your best to incorporate what they have told you into your future work.
* Also bear in mind that while general tips *should* hold true across a range of classes, it is possible that different assignments in other classes will require you to approach things from a different perspective. As a result, you should seek guidance on future assignments from the different professors, instructors and TAs that will be grading them. Sometimes, a thorough reading of the assignment documentation is enough. In other situations, you may need to ask clarifying questions.

More reading material on this topic:

<http://www.macleans.ca/education/uniandcollege/getting-the-most-out-of-your-professor/>

<http://www.firstgenerationstudent.com/blog/how-to-approach-a-professor-for-help-tips-from-a-professor/>