

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PROFESSORS



DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Some faculty are more approachable, more outgoing than others. No matter the personality type of your instructor, if you want to do well in your classes, it's important to visit professors regularly in their office hours (see "Office Hours" guide). But if you don't already have a good rapport, how do you talk to them once you arrive in their office?

Introduce Yourself

Yes, your instructor has seen your face in class, but it takes a while for them to learn everyone's name. Help them out by offering your name and reminding them which class you're in (faculty teach more than one class per quarter).

Come Prepared

Bring the course texts, your notebook, a pen/pencil, and the syllabus. Write down some questions ahead of time, so you don't forget & you cover everything. Your faculty may give you suggestions on study habits or source materials, which is why you'll need a notebook. The more prepared you are, the more you'll benefit.

Tell Them About Yourself

The more your professors know about you – how many hours you work at your job per week; whether you commute from the suburbs; how long you've been at DePaul; which student groups you're involved in; what you are thinking of doing after college – the more they can understand you and where you're coming from. This is key to building any relationship and it's especially important if you ever need a letter of recommendation (which are only strong and effective if the person writing it knows you well).

Ask Them About Themselves

Professors are people, too. They have interests and lives outside the classroom and their experiences inform what they do. Ask them about how they became a professor, how they spend their free time, whether they root for the Sox or the Cubs, whatever. Venture to get to know them as people and they will become more familiar and more approachable to you. This will make it easier to talk to them the next time you visit them in office hours.

Discussing Your Grades

If you're disappointed or surprised by a grade you received, talk with your instructor ASAP. Talk in person during office hours. If the grade has upset you, wait until you calm down before contacting the professor. Review the graded assignment and the instructions beforehand. Compose a list of questions you want to ask before arriving at the meeting. Ask for advice on how to improve. Take notes in the meeting and ask your professor to review them for accuracy.

When You're Emailing...

- Include your full name and ID number
- Include the name of the class you're taking, e.g. SOC 214: Police and Urban Community
- Address your professor as "Dear Prof. {X}". Don't use "Hey" or other informal, casual language.
- Understand that you may not get an immediate response. A few days is not an unreasonable wait time.
- Proofread. Especially if you're composing the email on your cellphone.
- Think before you send. Did you check the syllabus for the answer? Are you clearly articulating your question or concern? The easier it is to understand what you're saying in the email, the easier it is for your professor to reply.