

How to Approach a Faculty Member

One of the best things a student can do is to get to know a faculty member. Since it can be intimidating to approach a professor, here are some suggestions to make it easier to get to know a faculty member.

- ◆ Address your faculty member professionally and respectfully. Remember that many faculty members are Doctors and should be addressed as “Doctor [name]” (faculty members who are not Doctors should be addressed as “Instructor [name]”) unless you are welcomed to address her/him by another name.
- ◆ Go to office hours and introduce yourself early in the semester. Even if it’s just to find out where the professor’s office is, you’ve made an extra effort to be engaged with the course and the instructor.
- ◆ Professors are human. If you make an effort to relate to them and their courses (especially by asking thoughtful questions), they will try to relate with you. Remember, however, that each professor has his or her own personality. Don’t expect every professor to behave in the same way. Some really are more approachable than others, so be aware of how a professor is interacting with you (and of how you are interacting with the professor).
- ◆ Keep up with the course and ask appropriate questions. As you read the textbook and handouts, work through homework, and study for quizzes and exams, you will discover that you have questions. Ask them in a timely fashion, and both your classmates and the professor will be grateful for your thoughtfulness and willingness to participate in class.
- ◆ If you’re uncomfortable speaking up, especially in a large class, go to office hours or e-mail the professor. Most professors understand how intimidating it can be to speak up in class. After all, they’re doing it at every class meeting.
- ◆ Respect the professor’s time. Professors are involved in much more than just the course you are taking. Most teach at least two courses per term, must participate on at least one committee, and are engaged in their own research. All of this takes time. Unless the professor states that he or she has an “open door” policy, don’t “pop in” on a professor and expect to be accommodated. Be thoughtful about the questions you ask when you meet in person, phone, or e-mail. Also, be aware that phone messages and e-mail may not get an immediate response (although if you don’t get a reply in a couple days, it’s reasonable to leave another message).

Reasons to engage faculty members:

- ◆ If you reach a point in the semester where you need help catching up or need a recommendation, these will be people who may be able to help you.
- ◆ If you need referrals to other university offices, these are people who may be able to tell you what resources are available.
- ◆ If you are interested in other majors, schools, or graduate programs, these people may provide you a network for making enquiries about those programs.
- ◆ These people are professionals and experts in their fields; you benefit from all of their knowledge.
- ◆ If you are interested in research, you may be able to join their research projects or to have them sponsor yours.