

How to Approach Your Professors

Adapted from Dr. Wanda Everage and Dr. Renae Chesnut

Approaching faculty in college is excellent training ground for approaching those who will be in authority (or perceived authority) positions in your professional careers.

So, we are looking ahead and not relying on how we have done things in the past as a measure of how to deal with situations now.

Therefore, how would you describe how you THINK you should approach a CEO of a company in your desired future career (a hospital administrator, a pharmacy manager, etc.) if you have a question or do not understand how to deal with a new concept, problem, or difficult situation and you need assistance?

Use this situation to think of some ideas that can be applied to your current situation when dealing with professors. Consider the following:

1. **Make sure you have read the material, tried to do the problems, and note where the material started to become difficult or the steps in a problem where you started to become confused.** Try to be as precise as possible about where you are experiencing difficulty instead of just saying to faculty "I don't understand this stuff."

Similarly, put yourself in the professor's shoes—if a patient comes in and says "I hurt" and that is all they say, what else do you need from them that would be helpful in trying to better determine the origin of the pain?

Hopefully you can now see why being able to more precisely describe to faculty the area(s) you are having difficulty will yield better information to help you with what you need to do to learn the material? When you meet with the faculty member, take the book, problems to be solved, etc. so you can even physically point to areas that are causing you difficulty.

2. **Make an appointment to sit down and spend more quality time with the faculty member.** While it is tempting to want your questions answered before or after class when many students are gathered around the professor, you might not have the same quality experience that you may get if a scheduled time is set up.

Important: Make sure you show up for your appointment. If an emergency does arise, make sure you contact the professor and let them know why you will not be able to keep your appointment. This is "good practice" now and in the future as a professional.

3. **Students must study the material regularly and take advantage of the academic resources offered by the academic departments.** We cannot reinforce this enough because if labs, supplemental instruction, tutoring, etc. are offered, students MUST take advantage of this and spend time working with other students and/or faculty who are there to assist them. Students can also form their own study groups and when questions come up about the material, then approaching their professor as a small group can also be helpful.

4. **Approaching faculty in a respectful and responsible manner will yield a respectful response from the professor.** Going to the professor with an attitude of hostility or in an accusatory manner will not yield the best results.

If, as a professional, you were to approach the person in charge in a hostile or accusatory manner, what would more than likely be the results? Remember, "actions speak louder than words."

5. Remember **Dr. Everage's formula for academic success** which can have a direct impact on future professional careers:
- a. **Go to EVERY class.** Being there demonstrates your commitment to this partnership in the learning process and professors are more likely to help you if you are willing to help yourself.
 - b. **Go to EVERY CLASS PREPARED.** Study! Study! Study! Remember the general rule—for every hour in class, you should study at least 2 hours outside class. 30-40 hours per week studying is not unlike the amount of time you will commit to your professional careers. This may be a different approach than you've done before. However, we are not trying to duplicate the past; we are trying to prepare you for the future.
 - c. **Initiate and maintain contact with your professors.** This is not "brown-nosing." This is called getting to know the "experts" in their field of study. They have the information you need and while their teaching style may be different from what you are used to, it is important that you learn from different types of approaches. As a professional, you will encounter various types of approaches; therefore, you are getting used to that when dealing with your professors.

In addition, think about how you behave in class, where you sit, and other ways that your professors know you. What do your actions say about you as a student and a learner?

- d. **Take advantage of the academic resources offered by academic departments and other support services.** Contact Access & Success for additional assistance with things like time management strategies and studying efficiently.