

Interacting with Professors

The whole reason you're at college is to do some learning. Rather than just throw books at you, colleges offer things called "professors" to guide you on your journey. Here are some tips to get the most out of your professors and teaching assistants, inside and outside of the classroom.

1.) Before signing up for a certain class, use Rate My Professors and other resources to learn more about your teachers.

- * On RateMyProfessors.com, students can evaluate how clear, how helpful, and how easy a professor is. Be sure to check out a professor here before you take one of their classes.
 - Of course, consulting friends who have taken their classes can be valuable as well.

- * Read the comments carefully to see *why* they're receiving a certain rating.
 - For instance, a challenging professor is entirely different from one who's just plain unfair.
 - You should also make sure they have qualities that matter to *you*, not just to other people. If you value out-of-class individual help, see if other comments have anything to say about the professor's ability to provide it.

- * Also, keep in mind that professors can change for the better, so check to see if the low ratings are mostly from old comments. If so, the professor might have listened to their feedback and improved.
 - I had some professors do complete 180s on unpopular policies. One professor received numerous complaints because students sometimes had to turn in an essay before they got the previous one back, meaning they wouldn't know what mistakes to avoid for that latter essay. He listened and gave himself the policy of always returning essays before the next one was due. Plus, I had one professor who was notorious for giving ludicrous amounts of work, but she backed off after receiving loads of feedback about it.
 - If a professor listens to student feedback and applies it to their teaching, doesn't that say something good about them?

- * People might give warnings about the professor's quirks. For instance, maybe they test you more heavily on the lectures than on the reading, or perhaps they drop your grade every time you miss a class. Knowing these policies in advance helps, so look up professors even if you're sure you'll take them.

- * Keep in mind that, while I often found a professor's ratings and comments accurate when taken as a whole, I have disagreed with them before.
 - For instance, I had one useless professor who rambled most of the class, and nobody commented on that. On the other hand, I once had to take a professor with incredibly low ratings and harsh comments, but I thought she was okay.

- * Be sure to look at *which class* the ratings come from.
 - Many comments will come from the lower-level classes since a whole lot of people take those. This limits how useful the professor's rating is to you later on because it's very possible for a professor to be easy in the 101 classes but tough in the 300+ levels.
 - A professor's teaching style may also vary among courses, even if they're roughly of the same difficulty. For example, one class may have lots of group work while another focuses on lectures.

- * If Rate My Professors has helped you, then you have a moral obligation to add your ratings and comments to professors you've had. People helped you, so shouldn't you help others?
- I'd recommend waiting a month or two after the class is over before you rate the professor. That way, the experience will have had time to soak in, and you're less likely to be biased.
- Don't give ratings in the middle of the semester with them: you never know how things will change for the better or for the worse.
- Please remember that your professor is a human being. Always speak about them with respect.
- The point of writing a review about a professor isn't to "get even" with the ones you dislike, but rather explain to future students what to expect from their class.

2.) Go to your professors for help whenever you need it, and treat them with respect.

- * Remember, professors are people who have toiled for years and years and years in school, memorizing lots of boring facts and writing lots of papers nobody will ever read. Every time you ask them a question, they get to feel smart and put all that trivia they've learned to good use. So, they'll enjoy helping you. Besides, it's their job.
- If your professor is using a teaching assistant, then that assistant should assist you! Don't hesitate to ask for help.

- * If you have a participation grade, then your professor might be more inclined to give you a good one if you contact them for help outside of class as well, especially for talking face-to-face during office hours.

- * If you have to write an essay, then ask the professor to read over your rough draft to make sure you're on the right track.
- Just having them look at your introduction (with its thesis) can help a lot.
- Not all professors will offer this service, but you may as well ask.

- * Although you could call or e-mail a professor for certain kinds of help, most prefer having back-and-forth dialogue without any distractions. They usually put their office location and office hours on the syllabus, so be sure to consult it.
- Besides, if they see you as a friendly person, that could help your grade and make it more likely for them to write you helpful letters of recommendation in the future.

- * Asking other students for help is fine, but remember that the professor knows the material best.

- * If you find yourself crying over a bad grade or another problem, don't go into your professor's office in that state. That's rude and counterproductive. Pull yourself together first so you can have a real conversation with them.

- * Asking professors to raise your grades is virtually never a smart idea.
- Absolutely never ask a professor for a higher grade just because you're an athlete who needs to maintain a certain GPA. That's unacceptable. I wouldn't be surprised if certain professors would choose to report your request to other authorities.
- If you believe an illness or something else outside of your control hurt your grade, then explain that to the professor.
- If you truly want a better grade, consider asking the professor if there are any extra credit projects you can do "to really delve into the material." *Make it clear you're willing to work extra hard to earn the extra points.* Don't ask for a higher grade without any work! Thank the instructor profusely if they let you earn extra points. Heck, send them a handwritten thank-you letter after your final grade is in.

- But remember, a professor's not obligated to do anything for you if your grade's lower than you want it to be. Try to keep your grades nice and high in the first place.

* You can also consult different professors while scheduling classes for the next semester.

- If there's a class you're unsure of, why not ask the professor themselves about it? I'm sure they'd be more than happy to tell you about the class or even give you an old syllabus of it. Comparing one syllabus to another could help tremendously when deciding which classes to take.

- To find a professor, look them up on your college's official website. You can e-mail them to schedule an appointment (make it clear you'd like to have a talk in their office), or you can just write down their office number. Most professors have their current office hours hanging outside their door. If you plan on comparing professors, you can see if their office hours overlap so you can visit multiple ones quickly.

- Remember, though, that professors have a lot of work to do and need to talk with their current students. So, be sure to respect their time. Be prepared by having questions in your head beforehand.

- Asking your current professors what classes to take next semester couldn't hurt either.

* Many colleges ask you to evaluate your professor at the end of the semester.

- Unlike Rate My Professors, this evaluation is official and private. Usually, only your professor and a few authority figures will read what you've written.

- Evaluate your instructors fairly. Let them know what they did well so they keep on doing it. Calmly give constructive criticism in areas where they didn't do well.

- Your evaluation should be targeted at the class and how well the professor taught it, not at how much you like them personally. Only mention their annoying personality traits if they directly interfered with your learning. For instance, if they enjoyed picking on students with unusual viewpoints, that hinders constructive discussion in the classroom, so point it out.

- An accurate evaluation will help not only the professor but also their future students. So, don't rush when evaluation time comes. For the sake of future students, take the time to tell the professor exactly how you feel about their teaching.

* College professors can be important people for writing recommendation letters, so stay on friendly terms with yours.

- This is important to know whether you're heading to grad school or starting your career after graduation.

- So if you performed well in one class and really connected with a professor, then stay in contact with them.

- Just saying hi when you see them can go a long way, but you can go even further if you'd like.

- For example, if you see something on the news that might interest them, e-mail a link to them and explain why it's intriguing. Of course, be sure to ask them how they're doing, too.

- If they have kids, then try to remember their names: all parents love that.

* Don't burn bridges with professors you hate.

- If you think they've behaved unethically, you should calmly voice your concern to them or to the appropriate authority figure.

- However, don't even dream about giving them a hate-filled diatribe for being a tough grader or anything petty.

- Even if you're giving "anonymous" feedback, they may guess whose it is.

- Revenge is immoral and, according to psychological studies, rarely makes you feel better.

- Plus, if you directly tell your professor how much you hate them, then they might share the story of your outburst with their colleagues. This may hurt your reputation among the professors you liked. It might also give your future professors a terrible first impression of who you are.
- Don't badmouth professors online, especially not on social media networks. No matter how secure your Facebook account is, your words could find their way to places you'd never expect.
- You never know how far down the road of life you may encounter professors again, so don't think that it's safe to somehow lash out at them later.

3.) During class, pay attention to the professor so you can make the most of your time.

- * I'd hate to break it to you, but it's usually easier to stay focused if you sit near the front of the room. Don't worry: professors don't bite, and I'm pretty sure teaching assistants don't either.
- The more often you sit near the front of a classroom, the less intimidating it becomes.

- * Whether or not your professor has a tricky accent, they won't mind if you ask them politely to repeat something during a lecture. Remember, they want students to learn about the things they've spent many years studying.

- * Do not write down *only* what the professor writes on the board. They say important things in their lectures aloud! And you'll forget a lot of what they say before the day's over, so just imagine how much you'll forget by the time final exams roll around.
- This might seem obvious, but some of my fellow college students sure needed this advice. I had one professor who wrote on the chalkboard only to spell out names and big words, so some students only wrote down a couple names and big words during each class period. Then they would complain about how useless the "professor's notes" were!

- * On a similar note, if an instructor uses PowerPoint or other presentation software in class, don't assume their slides cover everything.
- Again, they'll connect the dots in class, clarify important information, and add other facts. You should write down these important details. Professors aren't there to read notes aloud; they want students to dig deeply into the material.
- If a professor lets you access their PowerPoint slides before class, then consider printing them out (multiple slides per page, please) and jotting notes in the margins during the lecture.

- * Don't record your professor's lecture and then listen to it later. You have to sit there in class anyway, so that's usually just a waste of time and energy. Besides, what if you lose the recording somehow?

- * Do not browse the Internet or text during class, even if there's nothing happening at the moment. Professors aren't a huge fan of this. Besides, it might get your mind off track even when you put the phone away or close the Internet tab.

- * Do not be in a huge hurry to leave class the moment the scheduled period ends.
- Don't pack up your materials early as the end of class approaches. I had a number of professors who admitted this is one of their biggest pet peeves.
- Unless the professor's running so far over the scheduled period that you'll be late to something important, don't leave just because the clock says you should. They might still have relevant information to cover.
- Standing beside the door and waiting for them to shut up isn't exactly polite either.

* If you're absent from a class period, don't ask the professor later, "Did we do anything while I was gone?" This question makes it sound as if they sometimes teach classes where nothing important happens. Instead, apologize for missing the class and simply ask *what* you missed, not *if* you missed anything.

* This isn't high school, so don't expect an instructor to put up with any disruptive behavior. People are paying a ludicrous amount of money to be in the classroom, so if you're preventing them from learning, the professor will kick you right out.

* If possible, do not leave the room during class.

- One professor of mine prohibited it outright because it creates a distraction.

- Aside from that, though, you might miss something important while you're gone.

- So, use the restroom before class, and make sure all your personal items are ready to go. I, for one, always had chapstick, hand sanitizer, and a few tissues with me in my pockets. I also refilled my water bottle between classes.

- Long class periods lasting two or more hours tend to have official bathroom breaks, so don't worry about that.

- But of course, if you do need to leave for some reason, then just leave. In college, you no longer need to ask for permission to go potty.

* Staple your own darn papers. I've never understood why people always ask instructors for a stapler. Get your own, or borrow one from the library!

- Oh, and make sure you have your own materials for each class period, such as a pencil and paper or a fully-charged laptop. Professors don't enjoy it when people waste time by begging other students for supplies.

* Although most colleges don't have a clear dress code, be sure to dress appropriately for classes.

- For one thing, that gives the professor (and other students) a positive impression of you as someone who cares about the whole "learning thing."

- Secondly, staying dressed in your pajamas for class might make you look lazy or make you want to fall back asleep even more badly than you already do.

- You don't need to look like you're ready for a job interview, but use some common sense when getting dressed. You are at school, after all.

- Don't wear any t-shirts with images or text that could easily offend others, even if you don't mean it to be taken seriously. Personally, I had a beloved t-shirt that says, "Dyslexia makes reading NUF! NUF, NUF, NUF, NUF!" Rather than risk wearing it to my classes, I simply reserved it for my days off.

* I wouldn't recommend openly cussing in class, even though there are rarely rules against it.

Constantly falling back on vulgar language doesn't exactly make your vocabulary look stellar.

Instead, try getting your point across with a wider variety of words.

**As you navigate your tricky college classes, remember that professors are there to help.
Don't be shy about asking them for assistance in class or during their office hours.**

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