Best Practices for Communicating with your Professor

Your professor is one of the best allies you can have in your university education. Learn how to approach your professor and you’ll be off to a great start in developing a positive, rewarding relationship.

**An ounce of prevention: What to do before asking your professors questions**

- Read the syllabus carefully. There are few things professors find more frustrating than questions about topics clearly addressed in the syllabus.
- Prepare and create a point-form list of the question(s) you have.

**How to ask your prof questions outside of class**

- Stop by during scheduled office hours. Check your syllabus for details. Some professors will provide this information during the first lecture.
- Stay after class a few minutes to chat, especially if you have some burning questions or comments about the lecture.
- Email & set up a meeting. Don’t feel like you’re a “bother“! Professors care about your success. Professors also enjoy talking about their subjects, hence them choosing to spend so many years in their fields.

**How to write an email message to your prof?**

- Include a short, informative subject (e.g., PHIL 120, Section 01, Assignment 2)
  - Remember that many of your professors are teaching numerous classes, so don’t assume they know exactly which class/section/lecture/slide/assignment you are referring to.
- Always include a greeting and closing (“Hi Professor Whiting” … “Thanks, Megan”). If you aren’t sure how to address your professor, going with “Professor” is always a safe option.
- Keep the email messages brief and to the point, but use complete sentences!
- Proofread your email messages before sending them out.
- If you find yourself writing an emotional email to your professor, save it and sleep on it, then read it the next day.

**How to maintain positive relationships with your professors**

- Be professional and courteous, and allow for appropriate response times.
  - Professors vary, but most try to get back within a few days. Don’t expect hourly responses!
- Be involved & engaged in class – it’s a great way to show you’re interested in the class. In turn, this makes professors want to be there for you.

library.usask.ca/studentlearning

For more information on study skills, please visit our website.
How to attain additional feedback on assignments

- Carefully read any feedback provided on your assignment.
- If you aren’t sure how to interpret, it’s ok to stop by during your professor’s office hours or send email to set up a meeting.
- Try to take a wider perspective than solely grades. Focus on how you can do better in future assignments; grade-grubbing is generally frowned upon.

What else do your professors do with their time?

- Conduct (laboratory) research
- Write journal articles, books, reviews, etc.
- Collaborate with researchers at other institutions
- Write reference letters for students applying to graduate schools/jobs/scholarships
- Organize/present at /attend conferences
- Review papers for peer-reviewed journals
- Serve on committees
- Collaborate with researchers at other institutions
- Serve on committees

Bad email
This student sent a message from their personal email, e.g., bizzaro4julia@gmail.com

Good email
The best approach is to send your professor an email from your personal U of S email account, e.g., jdw123@mail.usask.ca or john.white@usask.ca