Do you have difficulty asking for help or seeking advice from your professor or teaching assistant? If you do, you’re not alone.

Some professors can seem unapproachable, and it can be frustrating to try to talk to them. But they understand and expect you to run into trouble and ask questions.

**What’s in it for me?**

If you make an effort to get to know your professors, they may be willing to help you with class material and provide guidance in the future.

They can help by providing:

- Feedback on test or essays
- Extra instruction on difficult topics
- Advice on which classes to take
- Career guidance
- A letter of recommendation to land a job or get into graduate school
- Mentorship
- Information on opportunities to boost your resume, like research, clubs, or volunteering
- And MORE!

See, Professors are people, too!

**Rules of Thumb**

Here are some tips on how to best approach your professor or TA:

1. **Identify the Problem**

Before asking your professor for help, you need to identify the problem and come prepared with possible solutions.

Be specific about what you are having difficulty with. For example, “I don’t understand the implications of the Franco-Prussian War on modern European history” will be more likely to help your professor to guide you than, “I am lost in class.” Don’t be afraid to be lost, but attempt to tell them why!
2. **Be prepared**

Before your meeting, create a list of questions that you want to ask. This will minimize the chance of forgetting to ask a particular question. Be on time and bring your textbook and notes.

3. **Check the Syllabus for Office Hours**

Many times, professors and TAs are required to have office hours; there are usually walk-in hours where you can drop by without an appointment.

However, it’s best to make a habit of letting your instructor know that you’ll be there—just in case they decided to go get a cup of coffee. Plus, it’ll give them time to prepare.

4. **Email Your Instructor**

Professors actually have a life outside of the classroom, so if you need to meet with them, you should shoot an email, especially if you can’t come during their office hours. In the email, be as polite as possible and specific. Instructors often teach many classes with even more students. And, professors usually expect common email conventions: a greeting, a closing, and a lack of “txt-spk from u.”

One approach you could use is, “Professor Smith, I’m in your _____ class and am having trouble with _____. Could I meet with you at your earliest convenience to discuss it? Thanks, Joe.” Also, if you can’t keep your appointment, call or email to reschedule it ASAP.

5. **Check Yourself Before U Wreck Yourself**

When it comes time to actually meet up with your professor, you should be professional. If you got a bad grade on a test or essay, don’t be confrontational—that will only make matters worse.

Be patient and polite, but also be assertive if you feel that you haven’t gotten an answer to your questions. And don’t hesitate to ask to meet again if you don’t receive all the information you need.

You should also know your professor’s last name and use it with his or her appropriate title. They’ve worked hard to become a doctor! Don’t assume an informal greeting, unless the professor has specifically stated that a more casual greeting is preferred.

The more often you talk with a professor, the more comfortable you will feel in doing so again. And as you develop relationships with instructors, you may find that you’re doing better in class as well.

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Adapted from:
University of Florida Counseling & Wellness Center, “How to Approach a Professor for Help” [https://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/How-to-Approach-a-Professor-for-Help.aspx](https://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/How-to-Approach-a-Professor-for-Help.aspx)
