UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SWANSON school of engineering

freshman engineering

Using Your Professors & TAs

The Importance of Getting to Know Your Professors

Your professors are more than lecturers and researchers; they have real life experiences to share. Actually, your professors can be your biggest partner. He/She can help you succeed academically and prepare for your future. Studies have shown that students who make an effort to get to know their professors outside of the classroom setting, are more likely to succeed in college. Here are some reasons why you should form relationships with your professors:

- When you get to know them, professors are really fascinating people.
- When you create a good impression, your professor is more likely to help you with a question or later request.
- Professors can help answer your questions for up and coming exams.
- Professors can clarify points from their lectures and class discussions.
- Professors can offer career advice.
- Professors can write letters of recommendations for jobs, internships or graduate school.
- Professors can suggest professional or academic clubs or organizations to consider joining.
- Professors can serve as mentors, or help you locate someone else who could be.
- Professors can serve as a source for an on-campus job, summer internship or co-op, or research opportunity.

Tips for Forming Good Relationships with Professors

Professors want their students to succeed, but they can only help you if you take the first step. Here are some tips to help you make that first step and to develop a good relationship with your professors:

- Be sure to introduce yourself to your professor at the end of your first class.
- Be sure to use the title the professor prefers. Some professors prefer "Professor" to "Dr.".
- Drop by his/her office during posted office hours.
- **GO TO CLASS** Regular class attendance is important not only for good relations with your professors, but also for ensuring that you don't miss anything.
- **DON'T BE LATE!!** Professors usually use the first few minutes of class to make vital announcements about upcoming tests, due dates for assignments, etc.
- If emergencies arise, that cause you to miss class, be sure to get notes from a classmate whose work you respect. After your absence, see the professor in their office hours, telling them you've gotten the notes, but you want to double-check to make sure you didn't miss any announcements regarding upcoming tests and assignments.
- **Sit toward the front, center of the class.** This not only helps the professor associate you with the class, but forces you to pay attention!
- Always bring your notebook, textbooks and other needed supplies to class. This communicates preparedness and interest, even if neither of these qualities applies to you.
- **Be courteous in class.** You do not have to agree with everything they are saying, but always be positive. Begin your question with leads like, "Could you clarify..." instead of "I don't see how..."
- **Build a positive reputation for yourself.** Get assignments in on time and visit their office hours as soon as you think you may be struggling (not after the damage is done).

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When making an appointment for an office visit with your professor, here are a few things to do before you go:

- Locate your professor's office ahead of time so that you will not be late for your appointments
- **Preview your text or readings** to familiarize yourself with topics for the course or next class discussion.
- **Review your notes** and identify the areas that you are struggling with or issues that you do not understand. Bring your notes to their office
- Write down questions that you may have.
- **Have specific questions to ask**. Do not expect the professor to re-teach material to you. Rather, use that time to have then clarify or elaborate subjects from lecture.
- **Be sure to address your professor by his/her proper title** (Dr., Mr., Mrs., Ms.) and know how to pronounce his/her name.

Contacting Your Instructors

Here is a table that you can use to log your professors' office hours and contact information. Keep this handy so that you can effectively make arrangements to meet with your professor regarding coursework and other forms of assistance that you may need.

Course	Instructor	E-mail	Phone	Office Location	Office Hours