

Tips for Successful Communication with Your Professors

Students have shown that one of the characteristics of successful students is their ability to communicate effectively their learning needs to their instructors. Yet very often, students wait until there is a problem before communicating these needs. Once a problem has occurred, communication becomes more difficult because feelings of anger and frustration can block problem solving and cooperation. To communicate successfully with your instructors, the following steps are suggested:

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY TO EDUCATE YOUR PROFESSORS REGARDING YOUR NEEDS:

By letting the professor know early on in the semester about your needs, you present yourself as a responsible student. This appearance can go a long way to enhancing the learning environment and creating a positive atmosphere when you need to speak with your professor.

FIND AN APPROPRIATE TIME AND PLACE TO DISCUSS YOUR SITUATION

- Make an appointment with your professor.
- Do not try to explain your needs as the teacher is rushing to or from class.
- Give the instructor time to meet your request; do not expect immediate, last minute results.
- If you cannot find a meeting, such as an office or the cafeteria, schedule a time to talk on the phone without interruption.

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING AHEAD OF TIME

- Identify what learning needs you have, and how the instructor can help you meet those needs.
- Be as specific as possible about what accommodations you need.
- This is the time to present your letter of accommodation from the ADA Coordinator's Office. This letter verifies that you need the specific accommodation(s) listed.
- If you have difficulty explaining what your needs are and why you need accommodations, please seek assistance in understanding your disability and your strengths and weaknesses from the ADA Coordinator.

(It is important to know yourself, your disability, your strengths and weaknesses in order to be able to discuss adequately your need for accommodations with your instructor.)

- You may want to give examples of what has worked in the past as a starting place for determining what may work in this new class.
- Be able to explain your strategies for learning and how you plan to be actively involved in the process.

DURING THE MEETING

- Go to the meeting with a positive attitude believing that the instructor is there to help you.
- Take turns speaking and listening without interrupting.

DURING THE MEETING (cont.)

- In an effort to make sure that you understand the other person, repeat back to him/her in your own words, what you think s/he is saying. Ask if you are correct. If not, listen again.

- Let the professor get to know you as a student by describing some of the study habits you use. This also communicates that you are taking responsibility for your own learning and not expecting the instructor to do everything for you.
- Look for creative solutions. Telling an instructor what has worked in the past for your should not imply that you expect the instructor to act the same way. Rather, this information should be used as a “springboard” or starting place to figure what to do to meet your needs now.
- If you have further concerns, question, or need more assistance, set up another meeting. Try not to fall into the trap of familiarity and think that because you have had one meeting that you do not need to have another.
- If you have followed the suggestions for effective communication and you are not able to work with your professor, contact the ADA coordinator at your school.

FOLLOW UP WITH THE PROFESSOR THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE SEMESTER

- Work together to find solutions when there are problems.
- Remember that your professor has many students, and s/he must balance the needs of all students in the classroom.
- Learning is a continually changing process. Do not be afraid to try new strategies and to ask appropriate questions in class. Try to be flexible and cooperative.

(Adapted from “Successful Conflict Resolution with a School” by Edward Achziger, Jr.)