



Guidelines for Effectively Communicating with Your Professors Regarding an Issue or Concern

1. BE PREPARED

- a. Understand course policies **before** you visit the professor to discuss a concern. Reread the syllabus, the professor's home page, and any applicable University policies.
- b. Be prepared to state your case, if necessary. If you are making a request, be able to explain what you are asking for and why. If you believe you fit an exception category, be prepared with specific information to support the exception, e.g., documents or a timeline of events.
- c. Think about whether the issue is a simple one that can be addressed via e-mail or a more complex one that requires a face-to-face discussion.

2. MAKE AN APPOINTMENT.

- a. If you have an issue or concern to discuss, try not to confront faculty in the classroom around other students; this removes your chance to have privacy and puts the professor "on the spot."
- b. Try not to approach faculty with a concern right before class when they are mentally preparing to teach; this prevents the professor from being able to focus exclusively on you and your issue.
- c. Stop by to see the professor during office hours or ask for an appointment at another time.

3. AT THE MEETING

- a. Treat the professor with respect. Be polite and respect time boundaries.
- b. Express some interest in course content. Show what you have already learned, and if the issue or concern is a substantive one, be prepared to ask very specific questions about what you don't understand. General questions won't help you as much as specific ones:
Example: I don't understand Topic A. (general statement)
Why is Topic A red and Topic B blue? (specific question)
- c. Take responsibility for any mistakes, misunderstandings or oversights on your part.
- d. Before leaving the meeting, be sure that you and the professor share the same understanding of the professor's decision or next steps to be taken. Ask for clarification if you are unsure. Consider following-up by e-mail, so that there is a written record that you can each review.

COMMUNICATING VIA E-MAIL THROUGH BLACKBOARD:

1. Review and observe all of the relevant guidelines above.
2. If the issue needs to be talked about face to face, ask in your e-mail to do this.
3. Give the faculty member time to respond. Remember that professors are not available 24/7. Expect that there may be some delay before you receive a response. It might take the professor a day or even two to get back to you during the semester, especially if they are teaching a large class.
4. Be careful about overusing e-mail with faculty, especially for questions that can be asked in class or where information is available in the syllabus or easily accessed elsewhere.

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5. Think about your audience. Don't use colors, smiley faces or fancy backgrounds. Avoid texting language, shortcuts and slang, e.g., "ttyl"
6. Always include a subject in the subject line.
7. Always include your full name at the end of the message.
8. Be respectful and don't use all capitals – DON'T SHOUT!
9. Avoid using c.c.'s, unless the professor has asked you to do so. Write to the faculty member first, solo, before bringing a lot of other people into the issue.
10. Review, reread, and rewrite before pressing 'send.' Remember that the professor can't see your face, and does not have access to nonverbal cues, so overly emotional messages leave room for misinterpretation.
11. Remember that e-mail is not confidential. You cannot prevent a recipient from forwarding an e-mail.
12. If you are the one forwarding an e-mail, review all of the content before forwarding and consider the consequences of broadening the circle of recipients.

GENERAL TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDENT/PROFESSOR COMMUNICATION:

1. The golden rule always applies. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. You have the right to ask questions and request further clarification on various aspects of the course but you also have the responsibility to do so respectfully and tactfully. Remember that this rule applies not only to professors but to administrators, secretaries, receptionists and other University staff.
2. It is usually better to address an issue sooner rather than later. If you know in advance that you will miss a class or need to request some special accommodation, give the professor as much advance notice as possible.
3. If the professor indicates that s/he has made a final decision on your concern, respect that decision and, if you wish to pursue the concern further, find out what options are available for doing so. You can always visit the Office of the Ombudsman if you are in need of guidance!
4. Keep on top of announcements made in class. Find a friend and exchange e-mail addresses so that you can learn of any in-class announcements you miss.
5. Review the syllabus *throughout* the semester and bring the syllabus with you to class. The syllabus explains the faculty/student expectations and responsibilities for the semester. Be aware that changes may be necessary during the semester. Check course changes on Blackboard, if appropriate.
6. Keep all of your course work and course materials until the end of the semester and after you have learned your official grade. If you have questions about a grade, you can review your work and compare it with the requirements of the course.

Contact the Ombudsman for discussion and resources if communication is failing or if you have questions or concerns. We are here to help all members of the campus community achieve healthy inter-personal interactions and communications.

Dawn Osborne-Adams, University Ombudsman, Binghamton University

By phone at (607) 777-2388

In person at UU-259

On the web at <http://www2.binghamton.edu/ombudsman/>