**How to Approach a Professor for Help**

**Introduction**

As a student, there are likely many times in which you have thought about seeking assistance from one of your professors and/or teaching assistants, yet have failed to do so for a variety of reasons (fear being seen as "stupid"; have not been to class in a while; do not know what to expect or are uncomfortable talking with someone of a different race, gender, or age). You may even come from a cultural background that discourages interactions with authority figures. Whatever the reason, you are not alone. You can learn how to approach a professor for help.

What can you do? Here are four steps you can follow:

1. Identify the reasons you’re seeking help.
2. Determine when to meet with your professor.
3. Organize your talk with your professor.
4. Talk with your professor.

Let’s go into more details about each step so you can understand these steps better.

**Step 1: Identify the reasons you’re seeking help.**

There are endless reasons for why you may need to talk with a professor. Listed below are just a few:

* You performed poorly on a quiz, exam, or other class assignment.
* You are unclear about an assignment, exam/reading schedule, policy on attendance, etc.
* You want to turn in an assignment late or take a test at a different time.
* You are unsure about your current major.
* You have missed class due to sickness.
* You are considering graduate school in the professor's area of expertise and want to ask the professor for a letter of recommendation.
* Your teaching assistant has not been regularly maintaining his/her stated office hours and you need assistance from your professor.

Now take some time to think about and write down your reasons for approaching your professor for help. This will be helpful later.

**Step 2: Determine when to meet with your professor.**

Once you have identified the specific reason(s) you need or want to speak with your professor, determine how quickly to do so.

If you need to speak to him/her as soon as possible, then a phone call, email (if a professor checks it frequently), or face-to-face contact in his/her office may be warranted. Be sure to ask if this is a good time to approach the professor for your specific need. One approach might be, "Professor Heart, I need to talk with you about \_\_\_\_\_\_ as soon as possible. When can I do that?"

* Keep in mind that a professor is typically less receptive to answering questions immediately before an exam is being distributed.
* Consider trying to meet during the professor's office hours.
* Check your syllabus or go to your professor’s webpage about office hours and other class policies.

**Step 3: Organize your talk with your professor.**

Arrive prepared with a paper list of why you’re approaching your professor for help. Being organized will reduce your anxiety. On your paper:

* Have all your questions written down.
* Bring a pen and more paper just in case you need to write something down.
* Have any class material that may be relevant to your discussion which may include:
  + Class notes
  + Homework
  + Syllabus
  + Textbook
* Record any information provided to you by your professor.

This step will allow you to arrange your thoughts clearly. It also demonstrates to the professor that you care about the class. This may reinforce any urgency in your discussion, too.

**Step 4: Talk with your professor.**

Be sure to know your professor's last name and appropriate title. Do not assume an informal greeting unless the professor has specifically stated that a more casual greeting is preferred. Be sure to arrive on time and be mindful of possible (and likely) time constraints. Don't hesitate in asking to meet again if you did not receive all the information you needed.

For example, "Professor Heart, I really appreciate you spending some time talking with me about graduate school as it will help me make some decisions. I would like to meet with you again to follow-up with some related areas. When can we arrange to do that?"

**Reminders**

The more often you talk with a professor, the more comfortable you will feel in doing so again (e.g. with other professors, teaching assistants, advisors, etc.). If you still feel uncomfortable about talking to a professor (and especially if you are having difficulty performing well in your classes), we encourage you to seek assistance at the Counseling Center.

**DSC Counseling Center**

You can call the counseling center during normal business hours to schedule an appointment. Please visit the center’s website (<https://bit.ly/2FBWmHN>) for additional tips on student well-being.

Location: Health Professions 266

Hours: 8am-5pm

Phone: 706-272-4430

DSC Public Safety: 706-272-4461

Georgia Crisis and Access Line: 1-800-715-4225

Tennessee Crisis Line: 1-855-274-7471

\*This form was modified from the KSU form “How to Approach a Professor for Help” at: <https://bit.ly/2QHi83t>