

## How (and Why) to Meet With Your Professors From the Smith College Toolbox<sup>i</sup>

When you go to office hours to meet with your professors, you don't have to have a specific plan. You can talk about why you are enjoying the class and share information about yourself as a student; you can do some online investigation of the professor's research interests and ask about that research; you can inquire about out-of-the-classroom experiences that your professor might recommend for a student who's excited about his or her field.

Think of the meeting as the beginning of a professional relationship. Use these guidelines to help you start that relationship on the right foot and to gain confidence as you prepare.

### Before the Meeting

- **Adjust your schedule so that you will be able to attend office hours.** Professors reserve office hours for the purpose of meeting with you, and they expect that you'll adjust your schedule in order to attend. If the hours *really don't work for you* (e.g., if you have another class or a lab at the same time) then e-mail the professor, proposing a few weekday times that work.
- **If you are scheduling the meeting, then use e-mail to provide basic background** about what you want to discuss, even including attachments if relevant, such as a draft of an essay, or a course schedule that you want feedback on. Let the professor know in advance if you want to discuss a personal matter or speak to him or her about learning challenges that you are experiencing.
- **Don't wait to ask for help.** Check in with your professors at the first signs that things are getting difficult or even if you just have questions about whether or not you are studying/preparing for class correctly. If you are particularly anxious about a course, it is fine to go talk to the professor at the very start of the semester just to let him or her know this is the case. However, *it is never too late to ask about getting help!*
- **If there is a personal, health, or disability-related concern** that you need to discuss with your professor, it is useful to meet early in the semester, rather than wait until a problem arises.
- **Be concrete, but flexible:** If you know what kind of help you need, ask for it, but be open to the professor's suggestions.
- **Prepare by anticipating what you'll need** to have during the meeting.
  - If you are going to office hours, bring your computer and/or notebooks, and papers and/or exams for the class. If you want the professor to look at or sign something, be sure you have it with you.
  - If it is a meeting with your advisor, then bring your course catalogue and notes. It's a good idea to draft schedules with various options already sketched-out.
- **Show up on time.**
- **Be ready to get what you need done in fifteen minutes**, especially during registration periods.
- If you have trouble remembering appointments or showing up on time, **create a reminder or prompt in your online calendar** or ask a friend to remind you.

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- If you have trouble speaking quickly, have an outline of what you want to say and focus on the major points. Tell the professor in advance that you may need more time for the meeting, or schedule a follow up meeting.

### When You Get to Your Professor's Office

- **Wait outside of the office if another student is inside or if the door is closed.** If the door is open, lightly knock and say something like, "I have a 10:00 appointment with you; are you ready for me?" or "I'm early, would you like me to wait?"
- When your professor invites you in, it's a good idea to **remind him or her of your name and class section.**
- **Call your professor Professor Smith • or Professor Jones, • using his or her last name** instead of just saying Professor. It's good to wait to be invited before using his or her first name.
- **If you want to ask a professor to be your advisor, just go for it!** You can say something like, I'm ready to declare my major and I want to know if you would be my advisor.
- **Avoid disputing a grade or asking for it to be changed, but do ask how you can do better,** or what you can do next time.
- **It's always nice to thank your professor at the end** of an appointment, even if you've been told something you don't want to hear like, "I don't give extra credit in this class."

### If You Need to Miss a Scheduled Meeting

- **Notify the professor** with a SHORT e-mail or voice mail as soon as possible.
- **Send a SHORT apology** over e-mail or voice mail if you miss it without notifying the professor.

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The Center for Work & Life developed this guide based on feedback from more than 30 Smith College professors, and in conjunction with:

- Julio Alves, director of the Jacobson Center for Writing, Teaching & Learning
- Riche Barnes, assistant professor of Afro-American Studies
- Laura Rauscher, director of Disability Services
- Kate Queeney, associate professor of chemistry and director of the Liberal Arts Advising program

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<sup>i</sup> Center for Work & Life, Smith College. (2012). How (and why) to meet with your professors. Retrieved 2/2, 2015, from [http://www.smith.edu/cwl/toolbox\\_meet.php](http://www.smith.edu/cwl/toolbox_meet.php)