

Communicating with profs and TAs

Contacting your professor

- Check your **course syllabus** for information about your professors' office hours and email or phone preferences.
- If possible, inform them in advance about the purpose of any meetings you request.
- Identify yourself by name, course, and section.
- Before requesting an extension on an assignment, check the syllabus for relevant information. For example, are marks deducted? When? How many? Are there exceptions?
- Communicate clearly and concisely. Like you, professors are busy.
- Be polite and formal in your interactions, unless you are invited to be informal.
- Do not expect an immediate response to your request. Professors might not check emails at night or on weekends.
- Respond promptly to their messages.

Meet your professors during their office hours

Professors want you to do well, enjoy their courses, and develop an interest in their fields of research.

They can:

- clarify difficult content after you have read the notes or text, attended the lecture, or tried the homework.
- encourage you when you may be feeling overwhelmed by the course.
- explain assignments after you've tried to understand their purpose, format, or expectations.
- stimulate your interest in a subject area. Your professors have research areas they are often deeply committed to. Ask them about their work, and see if you share their passion.
- be a reference for a job, a graduate school application or a research proposal, if they know you first.
- hire you for research help, which builds your practical experience.

Set a goal of speaking outside class with each of your professors at least once each term.

Working with TAs

Teaching (or lab) assistants (TAs) are usually graduate students who assist professors with specific tasks. In large classes, they are a connection between undergrads and professors.

- Ask your TAs how they want to be addressed. Even though they may be close in age to you, they may prefer some professional distance.
- Be polite when contacting TAs by email.

- Understand their role: TAs may lead tutorials, mark papers or exams, or hold office hours to answer questions.
- Ask for feedback on tests or assignments. Show your TA that you want to know how to improve (vs. criticize their grading).
- Respect their wishes about how and when you may contact them.

Troubleshooting

- Engage in the course: read your course syllabus for information on course objectives, topics, and key dates.
- Ask questions and offer ideas in class, so the professor knows who you are.
- Look for opportunities to talk with your professors outside of class, especially if you don't speak in class.
- Request feedback on how you are doing, and how to deepen your understanding or improve your grades.
- Try to learn more about your professors: their research interests, other courses they teach, or their community involvement.
- Attend talks or academic events at which your professors will be present.
- Offer professors or TAs positive and constructive feedback on the courses you are taking with them.
- Respect the professional boundary between professors and students.

For more on how to establish good communication and enjoy a productive working relationship with your supervisor, [see this resource](#) from the [School of Graduate Studies](#).

Email etiquette

Correct options are in **bold**.

1. Fill in the subject line with:

- nothing
- help
- **absent from MATH121 on Monday**

2. Start an email to an instructor with:

- hey!
- Hi Kim
- **Hello, Prof. Young**

3. Identify yourself, saying:

- Nothing; they can read the email address.

- I'm a student.
- **I'm in your MATH121 (Section B) course.**

4. State your request:

- please send the homework solutions
- I was sick and missed class. Any solutions handed out?
- **I was sick and missed class. I got notes from a friend, but I have a few questions. Can we please meet?**

5. Sign off with:

- Greg
- Greg Jones
- **Thanks for your time, Greg Jones (Student #15869923)**

Graduate students

For information on how **graduate students** can establish good communication and enjoy productive working relationships with their graduate supervisors, see [this resource](#) from the **School of Graduate Studies**.