

# Communicating with Professors and TAs

When 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**.