

Top 10 Times to Visit Your Professor's Office Hours

1. **Before you take an exam.** Discussing study methods and resources with your professor several days before the exam can make your study sessions more profitable. Analyze any study guides, review sessions, Canvas notes or other materials you've been given before you head to office hours, and use these to create specific questions. But be wary: you need to do this at least 3 days before an exam (a week is better); waiting until the last minute suggests that you aren't prepared, and that leaves a bad impression.
2. **When you get an exam back.** Talking over your exam results with the professor can help you see what he or she expects, and help you clarify and understand the material. Analyze the returned exam carefully before heading in for this talk, however; your professor will respond best if you begin the conversation by showing how well you've prepared for it
3. **Before starting a paper.** Any technique that helps you clarify your ideas will help you write a better paper, and your professor can be great resource in your search for clarity. Avoid asking "what do you want in this paper," because that sounds like "tell me what to write," and professors hate that. Instead, summarize the assignment in your own words and explain your ideas for the paper, and then ask about one or two concepts, or whether a certain resource might be helpful to you. Take ownership of the paper, and show that ownership to your professor.
4. **When you have a rough draft.** Find out whether you're on the right track now, when you can make changes that matter. This is also the time to continue clarifying your ideas, and the rough draft gives you and your professor something specific to assess. A short talk about a rough draft can save you from a long talk about a bad paper grade.
5. **When you get a paper back.** Professors try to make their comments on a paper clear and helpful, but you may still need help understanding what to improve in your next paper or how to do it. And it's ok to ask for handwriting translations, too!
6. **Mid-semester when you think you're doing well.** Just check in—chatting with the professor or checking to see if you're doing as well as you think shows your commitment to and interest in the course material. And such a conversation can help you and your professor create a comfortable, professional relationship.
7. **Anytime you're struggling.** Make a specific appointment for this conversation; you want to have enough time to discuss your problems, present possible solutions you have thought of ahead of time (always do this!), and ask whether the professor knows of any additional resources or techniques you could use. Go prepared—figure out where you think you're going wrong, and ask whether the professor agrees with your assessment. Develop a specific question or two about concepts, readings, or lecture points that confuse you.

8. **When you're really interested in an idea or topic.** Ask your professor for additional readings or other ways to continue exploring. Ask about courses you might want to take next semester, too. Don't fake this interest, however—faking interest usually backfires.
9. **If you foresee a legitimate absence from class.** If you notify a professor of your problem ahead of time, they're more likely to cut you a break; wait until after you missed class, and you're sure to run into problems. Review the class attendance policy first, and plan on turning in any assignments early, not late. Don't say "is it ok if I miss class?" because to your professor missing class is never "ok." Instead, apologize for a situation out of your control, and explain that you know nothing can really make up for missing class but that you're willing to do whatever you can to compensate. A little humility goes a long way in this situation. (For emergency absences, always notify your Deans' office, and try to e-mail your professors, too.)
10. **When you're looking for a friendly ear.** Professors can't resolve your roommate problems or get you a new meal plan, but they can point you toward the right campus resources, consult about general academic difficulties, and sometimes lend a little life experience to help you over a rough patch.

For more support with the transition to college life, visit the Study Mentors. Make an appointment via StudyHub on the CTL website, or stop in to visit us on the second floor of the library.