

## How to Talk to Professors about Personal Matters

If personal issues are impacting your academic performance, it's sometimes smart to reach out to your professors and let them know.

- **Don't wait until it's a last-minute crisis.**
  - Be proactive. As soon as you know there's a potential problem, give them a heads up (email might work for this). That way, if you need to approach them later for specific support, it won't be entirely unexpected.
- **Make the decision to ask for support.**
  - Being assertive is effective. It is not pushy, rude, or selfish when communicated with respect.
  - Commit to asking for what you need. Don't do it halfway. Being indecisive and unsure of what to ask for will decrease your effectiveness.
  - Commit, but also understand there are elements that are out of your control. Do your part, and do your best, and be flexible about what comes next.
- **Have an in-person conversation, if possible.**
  - This shows respect for the professor and also conveys that you are taking the process seriously.
- **Identify what you need from the conversation.**
  - Are you making a request, like having a due date moved or extra office hours? Or do you simply want to inform them that there's a reason you haven't been performing as well as usual? Be clear about your intention before starting the conversation.
- **Be as calm as you can when you approach them.**
  - Being upset or emotional can cloud your ability to think and articulate yourself.
  - Remember that you can only control yourself and do your best.
- **Tell them directly what you are seeking, and ask if they're available for the conversation.**
  - "I'd like to share about some personal challenges I'm having that are impacting my performance. Can I talk with you?"
  - "I need to request an extension on this assignment, and I'd like to tell you why. Is now a good time to talk about it?"
- **Describe the situation.**
  - Stick to the facts.
- **Express how you are affected.**
  - Don't assume your feelings are self-evident.
- **Ask for what you want.**
  - Say it directly and specifically.
    - "I'd like an extension on the assignment until [date]."
    - "I just want you to be aware in case I need support in the future."
  - Assume that others will not figure out what you want unless you ask directly. They cannot read your mind. Also, don't expect them to know how hard it is for you to ask.
- **Explain the consequences.**
  - Tell them how it will help you to have your request granted (if you are making a request).
- **Remember your role.**
  - You are a student, and they are a professor. Your needs are very important, and also, your professor has dozens, if not hundreds, of other students.
  - Be concise and direct. This shows you recognize their time is valuable.
  - While being concise and direct, also be sure to communicate the pertinent information.
  - Be flexible. Some professors might want to ask questions and get a fuller picture, and some may not feel the need to know more.

- **Be confident, and receptive.**
  - If someone's frustrated or having a bad day, they may seem annoyed or unhappy about your need to talk with them. Don't let that derail you.
  - Try not to respond to irritable comments that are irrelevant. Stay on topic.
  - Stay grounded and calm, and if needed, repeat your request calmly and patiently.
  - Act calm and confident, even if you don't feel it.
- **Reflect their point of view.**
  - Show you have heard them and can understand their side of it.
    - "I hear that you can't change due dates for everyone who asks, and it sounds frustrating to be asked. And, if possible, based on my circumstances, I'm requesting an exception."
- **Be willing to negotiate and compromise.**
  - Maybe you cannot get what you want, but perhaps they can meet you halfway.
  - Offer and ask for alternative solutions that would help.
  - Reduce your request if needed. Focus on what will work.
- **Thank them.**
  - Even if you didn't get what you wanted, thank them for hearing you and for their time.
- **It may not work.**
  - Sometimes professors cannot accommodate requests, so be prepared. Having your request declined is not the end of the world. Don't make it mean more than it does. It was still a good idea to try.