

What to Ask Professors During Office Hours: Topic Areas to Consider

It's normal to be a little nervous when talking to a professor one-on-one for the first time, especially if you're naturally shy. However, the vast majority of professors are friendly people who genuinely want to see you succeed, both in your studies and in your life after college. The following are topic ideas to help you in planning what to ask your professor when visiting him/her during office hours.

Missed Classes

If you recently missed a class, it's a good idea to visit your professor during office hours. Of course, you can also ask fellow classmates about the topic of discussion during that class, but your professor can provide further insight. During office hours, you can also obtain any handouts provided during class.

Academic Performance

Many students only take advantage of office hours when they aren't doing as well as they had hoped in a class. This can be helpful, as your professor can certainly offer advice for improving your grades. However, you can also visit the office even if you're doing well in the class. After all, it takes continued hard work to sustain good grades.

Tricky and Confusing Concepts

It's perfectly normal for students to not understand everything right away. If you've been having trouble with a particular concept that your professor has discussed in class, you should go to their office hours and ask for additional help. Your professor may be able to explain the concept in another way or add greater context to enhance your understanding.

Personal Issues

In most cases, it's best not to overshare your personal issues with your professor. However, if you've been missing classes or having trouble keeping up with the assignments because a family member is ill or something else significant has happened, you're likely to find that your professor may understand, but that doesn't guarantee they will give you a pass.

Campus Resources

Not all students learn effective study habits in high school. If you're having trouble keeping up with college-level work, you can ask your professors if they can recommend some study



tips that helped them tackle the subject matter when they were undergraduates. They can also recommend resources that will help you.

Graduate School

Are you thinking about furthering your studies in graduate school? Your professor can be a great source of information about what you might expect as a graduate student.

Research Opportunities

Learning for learning's sake alone is fantastic, but most students go to college with the hope of putting their degree to work when they graduate. Perhaps you enjoy a particular field of study, but you're not quite sure what careers would be open to you down the road. Consider asking your professor about the possibilities in that field.

Interesting Topics

Most professors entered academia because they genuinely enjoy the learning process, and they consider themselves to be lifelong learners. This means they tend to like it when students express interest in various topics discussed in class. If something discussed in class piqued your interest, feel free to go to office hours to talk about it further and perhaps ask for recommendations for further reading.

Upcoming Courses

Your academic advisor will be largely responsible for helping you plan your schedule and ensure that you meet all credit requirements. However, you should feel free to approach a professor to discuss any upcoming courses they might be teaching next semester.

If you really enjoyed the current course you're taking with that professor, they might recommend an upcoming class that you're also likely to enjoy. They can also answer any questions you might have about their upcoming courses.

Internship and Job Connections

For engineering and Computer Science students, your primary point of contact is Nada Abdelhack (esscareers@unm.edu) located in the Engineering Student Success Center (ESS). An additional resource for campus wide students is the Office of Career Services, located at the One Stop on the 2nd floor. However, it can be worth it to ask your professors if they have any connections that might help you. Professors often keep in touch with former students, former employers, and professional organizations, and they might be able to connect you to an invaluable opportunity.

Letters of Recommendation

Students often need to ask professors for letters of recommendation when they apply to graduate school, scholarships, or internships. It can be difficult for a professor to write a



letter of recommendation when they have not had any interactions with the student outside of class. If you visit your professors outside of class from time to time, they'll get to know you better and they'll be better able to write a glowing recommendation for you.

Are you still not quite sure what to ask professors during office hours? Here are some examples of questions to ask:

- I'm having trouble narrowing down my topic for the paper. Can you please offer some guidance?
- What can I do to improve my grades in this class?
- What are the most common mistakes you see on papers for this class? Do you have any guidance for avoiding those mistakes?
- I really enjoyed learning about this topic. Can you recommend resources for further reading?
- I like this field of study, but I'm not sure whether I should major in it. What are some of my career options in this field?

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