

# BARRIERS, WISDOM, TIPS: How to Talk with Your Instructor

Speak with your instructor or TA to:

- Get to know each other.
- Review the syllabus and discuss any questions.
- Clarify expectations for the course.
- Share your questions, concerns, learning needs, and updates.
- Learn about study sessions, tutoring, future similar courses, and research opportunities.
- Prepare for tests, quizzes, projects, presentations, research, and papers.
- Acquire early feedback before you submit final assignments.
- Review your developing course grade and ways to improve.



**It takes time to be comfortable with instructors. Identifying Barriers, Wisdom, and Tips can help.**

WHAT STUDENTS HAVE SAID ABOUT... THEMSELVES		
BARRIER	WISDOM	TIPS
☹️ The instructor will think I'm not trying.	Asking questions shows you seek solutions.	✓ Point to specifics in assignments, notes, or other information you want to cover. It's helpful to show where you attempted material.
☹️ It is weak to ask for assistance.	Asking helps you make the most of college.	✓ Think of a time when someone asked for assistance, and as a result, got closer to their goals.
☹️ I should not show I don't understand.	No one grasps all material all the time.	✓ Remember: No one understands everything.
☹️ There is something wrong with me if I have questions.	We all have questions. It means we are thinking.	✓ Consider that others have questions, but don't ask. When you ask, you help others who remain silent.
☹️ Everyone else understands.	It is a false assumption that you are the only one with questions.	✓ By asking, you take a leadership role.

WHAT STUDENTS HAVE SAID ABOUT... THE SITUATION		
BARRIER	WISDOM	TIPS
☹️ I have other non-negotiable obligations during office hours.	There is alternate mutually-available time to meet.	✓ It's okay to ask if your instructor can meet at a mutually-available time.
☹️ There are too many other students.	Sometimes office-hours are busy and populated.	✓ Alternatively, you can email questions to your instructor.
☹️ It is just not possible to connect with my instructor.	Your advisor wants to help if you've been unable to contact your instructor.	✓ Tell your advisor, who will help you connect with your instructor.
☹️ My issue is health-related and I don't know how to share.	Many of us need support normalizing mental and physical challenges.	✓ Talk to your academic advisor or access any of these resources if you would like support informing your instructor: <a href="#">Looking for Help Chart</a> .
☹️ I need help for my final, but I never talked with my instructor.	You benefit by speaking with instructors early and often.	✓ Check in with your instructor as soon as difficulties arise or questions come to mind.

## WHAT STUDENTS HAVE SAID ABOUT... THEIR INSTRUCTOR

BARRIER	WISDOM	TIPS
<p>☹️ My instructor can't meet.</p>	<p>Office hours are part of an instructor's job.</p>	<p>✓ Believing an instructor cannot meet is not factual: Part of an instructor's job is office hours.</p>
<p>☹️ Office hours are too intimidating.</p>	<p>You may be uncomfortable on your first try, but instructors welcome good questions. They understand students ask about material.</p>	<p>✓ Consider that your instructor was once a student too and also needed to ask questions or get help.</p> <p>✓ Consider bringing a friend to office hours with you.</p>
<p>☹️ My instructor will not understand my circumstance.</p>	<p>We all encounter difficulties. Your instructor can share options with you.</p>	<p>✓ Before visiting, consider meeting your advisor for practice, support, information, and a follow-up plan.</p>
<p>☹️ Faculty are the experts. I don't want to question them.</p>	<p>College is about an exchange of ideas.</p>	<p>✓ Faculty welcome opportunities to improve teaching and learning.</p>

## WHAT STUDENTS HAVE SAID ABOUT... THEIR ABILITY

BARRIER	WISDOM	TIPS
<p>☹️ I don't know how to visit office hours.</p>	<p>Like forming any skill, visiting takes practice.</p>	<p>✓ List questions in advance, so you are prepared to ask about what you need, or don't understand.</p> <p>✓ Consider running your questions by a friend, mentor, your advisor, or other ally before visiting.</p> <p>✓ Ask your instructor in advance for common goals, what to expect, and how to prepare for office hours.</p>

### What Instructors Say...

- "I know students are really busy, trying to juggle other classes, labs, work, athletics, and personal matters."
- "They can email the TA and me, and I'll happily find a mutually convenient time to meet, in person or by Zoom."
- "I get to know students at office hours, to talk about an assignment or just chat about news that's relevant to the class."
- "Getting to know students better makes it much easier to write a recommendation for an award, grad school, or a job."
- "My favorite part of my job is getting to know students, and one of the best ways is by visiting my office hours."
- "I'm happy to answer questions, but we can also just talk about your interests outside of class."
- "I am still in touch with students who I got to know in office hours in my Intro classes who have graduated."
- "Your professors really enjoy talking to you one on one."

**Was your instructor meeting successful? Do you want additional guidance?  
Let your academic advisor know!**