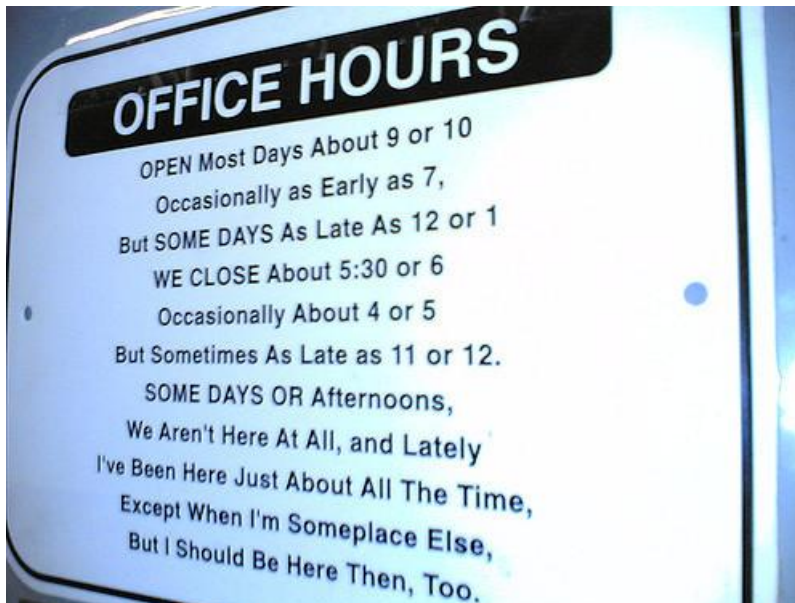


[See this page in the course material.](#)

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate effective communication strategies with instructors



The most common “conflict” that students experience with instructors is feeling that they’ve received a lower grade than they deserve. This may be especially true for new students not yet used to the higher standards of college. It can be disappointing to get a low grade, but try not to be too hard on yourself or on the instructor. Take a good look at what happened on the test or paper and make sure you know what to do better next time.

If you genuinely believe you should have a higher grade, you can talk with your instructor. How you communicate in that conversation, however, is very important. Instructors are used to hearing students complain about grades, and they will likely patiently explain their standards for grading. In general, instructors seldom change grades. Still, it can still be worthwhile to talk with the instructor. You will gain from the experience even if your grade doesn’t change.

Here are guidelines for talking about a grade or resolving any other problem or disagreement with an instructor:

- **Go over the requirements for the paper or test and the instructor’s comments.** Be sure you actually have a reason to evaluate the grade—not just that you didn’t do well. Be prepared with specific points you want to discuss.

- **Make an appointment with your instructor.** For face-to-face classes, don't try to talk about your concern before or after class.
- **Be polite.** Begin by politely explaining that you thought you did better on the assignment or test (not simply that you think you deserve a better grade) and that you'd like to go over it to better understand the result.
- **Allow the instructor to explain his or her comments on the assignment or grading of the test.** Don't complain or whine; instead, show your appreciation for the explanation. Raise any specific questions, or make comments at this time. For example, you might say, "I really thought I was being clear here when I wrote . . ."
- **Use good listening skills.** Whatever you do, don't argue!
- **Ask what you can do to improve the grade, if possible.** Can you rewrite the paper or do any extra-credit work to help make up for a test score? While you are showing that you would like to earn a higher grade in the course, also make it clear that you're willing to put in the effort and that you want to learn more, not just get the higher grade.
- **If there is no opportunity to improve on this specific project, ask the instructor for advice** on what you might do on the next assignment or when preparing for the next test. You may be offered some individual help or receive good study advice, and your instructor will respect your willingness to make the effort—as long as it's clear that you're more interested in learning than getting a good grade.

Working with Instructors: Key Points

- **Go the extra mile:** Talk to your professor when you
 - need an extension
 - need clarification on course material
 - are experiencing challenges in your personal life that impact your academic performance
 - are considering pursuing a major or graduate degree in their subject area
- **Visit early:** Building rapport with your professors early in the semester will pay off if you need an extension or extra help later on. Professors like it when you visit office hours, but they don't appreciate it when panicked students ask for an extension an hour before an assignment is due. Most professors will be very accommodating if you ask for help well in advance.
- **Show your interest:** Professors want you to be as interested in their subject as they are. Nothing excites them more than knowing you are passionate about what they teach. You can show your interest by participating in class, attending office hours, and emailing your professors if you have questions.
- **Meet your professor:** Professors have many responsibilities to juggle including research, teaching, traveling to conferences, and administrative tasks. However, they DO want to talk with you. Go to office hours and meet your professors!
- **Build relationships:** Believe it or not, your professors are really interesting people. You might just enjoy their company. They can also open doors to academic research, serve as mentors, and may write you a reference letter down the road. Build strong relationships with your profs while you have the chance.

The following video from NC State University is a good summary of the ideas and guidelines shared in this section on working with instructors:



[Video Link](#)

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