

The Savvy Student: 8 Tips for Communicating with Professors

#1 – Be Efficient

Use your professor’s preferred mode of communication. Is it email, calls or visits during office hours, or sending a message through the course portal? If the syllabus doesn’t specify, ask.

#2 – Be Informed

Before asking a course-related question, be sure that you have thoroughly read the syllabus, checked for updates on the course website, scanned class notes, and reviewed all emails.

#3 – Be Courteous

The most common way to address faculty is “Dear Professor (last name).” Some instructors may invite you to use their first name, but when in doubt it’s best to be formal.

#4 – Be Clear

Start by giving your name, student ID#, and the course number and section. Avoid using emojis, texting slang, or overly-informal language. Be brief and take time to proof-read before sending.

#5 – Be Proactive

If you’ll be absent, late with an assignment, or need accommodations, notify your professor in writing as soon as possible. Faculty are more inclined to help if you’ve done your part.

#6 – Be Honest

If you are struggling with the course material or need extra time, ask your professor or TA for help before assignments are due. Don’t ever cheat, copy, or make up excuses.

#7 – Be Patient

Faculty can’t always respond immediately. If you haven’t heard back from your professor after two full business days you might politely reach out again and include your previous email.

#8 – Be Respectful

If you become frustrated or disagree with a professor’s decision, don’t reply with ALL CAPS, resort to insults, or make threats—it’s not appropriate or effective. Pause and get some advice and perspective. Consider consulting your advisor, the department head, or the Ombuds Office.

Courtesy of the UMass Ombuds Office

A confidential resource for resolving university-related conflicts and concerns

www.umass.edu/ombuds ombuds@umass.edu 413-545-0867