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## Communicating Effectively on Campus

Building connections with faculty and other members of the campus community is an important part of your academic and professional development. By getting to know your professors, you'll gain a deeper understanding of the course material, learn about its application in the larger world, and discover meaningful solutions to real problems. Faculty and staff members can help you clarify your goals and mentor you as you consider your graduate school and professional options.

Whether you'll be meeting after class or during office hours, chatting over the phone or by email, throughout this guide you will find tips that will help you build and maintain productive relationships with your professors and other professionals, such as advisors and prospective employers.



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

*50 Years*

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UNIVERSITY ADVISING CENTER

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# Communicating Effectively on Campus

## Why Should I Contact a Professor?

- To gain a better understanding of the subject area and see if it might lead to a major, minor, or related career field.
- To learn about research opportunities.
- To find out how you are progressing in the course or to ask for clarification of course content, such as homework assignments, grades, or exams.
- To let the professor know you are experiencing difficulty in his or her class and ask for assistance or suggestions for completing the course successfully.
- To request an appointment if you are not able to visit during the professor's office hours.
- To inform the professor of a class absence(s) and inquire about missed content or classwork.
- To ask for a letter of recommendation in support of an internship, employment, or graduate school application.
- To express a concern. You have the right to express a concern and, if necessary, follow up with the department chair. If the concern continues, you may consider requesting a meeting with the college dean.

## Common Communication Questions

### What should I do if I can't find my professor's office location, phone number, or email address?

The campus-wide directory can be found on the UMass Boston homepage, [www.umb.edu/offices\\_directory](http://www.umb.edu/offices_directory), or the address book in your student email account.

### If I missed class or will be absent for an extended period of time, what should I tell my professor?

An initial method of contact regarding an absence is email, but it is best to communicate in person or by phone if possible, even if it's after the absence. This demonstrates your understanding of the value of class time and your desire to remain on track. An extended absence requires a more direct discussion about your options and your ability to complete the course.

### I tried to contact my professor and I have not received a response. What should I do?

- Be patient! Just like you, faculty and staff have various responsibilities and may only periodically check their voice mail or email throughout the day. Expect at least 24 hours to pass before you receive a response. If you call or email after 5:00 p.m., on a weekend, or during a holiday break, you will likely receive a response when the campus reopens.
- Follow up in person or by phone if you have not received a response after two business days. You may also contact the departmental office or administrative assistant for help.

### How can I ask my current/former professor for a letter of recommendation?

It is best to discuss this in person so the professor can ask you questions about the recommendation and learn more about your qualifications. You should ask for the recommendation well in advance of the due date. Also, as this is something that will require the professor's time and energy, you should show your appreciation with a "Thank You" email or card.

### What are my next steps if I am unhappy about a grade or if I have a concern?

- It is best to have this discussion in person, although you may initially communicate via email that you would like to schedule a meeting to discuss your grade.
- Give yourself time to compose your thoughts and collect materials that may support your opinion. This will likely give you the best opportunity to present your points as clearly as possible.
- If, after meeting with your instructor, you feel you would like to take your concern a step further, you may contact the chair of the department.

## TOP 10 TIPS WHEN CONTACTING A PROFESSOR

- 1 Check your course syllabi for the professor's preferred contact information (email may or may not be his or her preference).
- 2 If you call or send an email, identify yourself with your full name, the course and section number, your student ID number, and additional contact information. For email, always use your UMass Boston email account (see "Sample Emails" Be sure to forward your school email to your personal account).
- 3 If you are emailing, include a clear subject line (ex.: PSYCH 100: Question about Data Collection for Project).
- 4 Refer to your professor respectfully (ex.: "Dear Professor Brown" or "Hi Ms. Brown").
- 5 Make sure that your tone is polite, especially in an email, as it can easily be misinterpreted. Don't use text messaging abbreviations or slang.
- 6 If your concern or question requires a detailed response, a face-to-face conversation is often better than an email. Try to meet your professor in person or request a phone appointment.
- 7 Proofread your email and make sure to finish it respectfully with an appropriate closing (e.g., "Sincerely" or "Thank you"). After the professor has responded to your email, be sure to thank him or her and, if necessary, ask questions that may help clarify what was said in the first email. If you were given advice or instructions, follow up once you have done what the professor asked. Faculty and professionals like to mentor students, and they appreciate getting status updates.
- 8 If you'll be meeting in person or conversing by phone, prepare your questions and take good notes during the meeting.
- 9 Do not assume you can submit assignments as email attachments unless your professor has indicated that it is an acceptable method of submission.
- 10 Be patient while you wait for a response. Faculty and staff are generally available during office hours, and professors may only be available during the semester. They may not be checking their email at night, on weekends, or during holidays.

## Sample Emails

### DO

- ✓ Identify yourself
- ✓ be polite
- ✓ be clear
- ✓ be concise



### DON'T

- ✗ Give incomplete information
- ✗ Send a message with errors
- ✗ be overly informal

