

Successful Learning Strategies

SLS-Communication 1

GETTING ALONG WITH INSTRUCTORS

Students at Palmer College have a variety of resources available to help them succeed in college. Yet, one of the more obvious resources available to students is often overlooked – professors and instructors. The following information is meant to help you work with your professors and instructors to ensure your success. Your Faculty is a group of experts in content, technique and practice. If you start thinking of yourselves as doctors and conduct yourselves in that manner, then start thinking of your instructors as consultants and approach them that way.

What do instructors want from me?

Think about people you've met. Some had qualities and characteristics that helped you want to get to know them better. Others had characteristics that resulted in your feeling relieved to see them go. It is no different with professors. They may meet and interact with 100's students each year! Your behavior will determine if their reaction to you is positive or negative.

DO	DON'T
Come prepared to class and/or to the instructor's office during office hours. If you have missed class, get the lecture notes from another student before you ask questions.	Ask questions that show you haven't done the assigned reading or that you haven't been listening to the lecture.
Take the trouble to read the chapter and ask specific questions about concepts that are giving you trouble.	Ask general questions such as "Could you explain Chapter 3?"
Ask self-directed questions of the instructor during office hours.	Ask self-directed questions during class, such as "When can I take my makeup exam?"
Find out from the classmates what handouts were distributed, ask for their copies, and then photocopy them for yourself.	Ask during class for any handouts that you missed because of an absence.
Turn in assignments on time. Instructors are not likely to accept your excuses more than once or twice. They've heard them all before and often.	Expect the instructor to accept your excuses for turning in late assignments if you do so too often.
Act respectfully and courteously. Come to class on time; leave when the class is over. If you are discourteous in class, instructors will be much less likely to go out of	Offend your instructor. Falling asleep or reading during a lecture, consistently coming late to or leaving early from class, and talking to a classmate are insulting and

their way to help you. Put yourself in their position, and imagine what it is like to stand in front of a group of 100-200 students who are sleeping, talking, or otherwise uninvolved in the class.

offensive to an instructor. Even with 200 students, instructors get to know students especially if they consistently do things like these.

How do I talk with my professor?

Many students find themselves anxious and tongue-tied when needing to talk with a professor. Here are some suggestions about how to talk with your instructor.

1. *Schedule an appointment to see your instructor during his/her office hours.* REMEMBER: your instructor also uses his/her office time to grade papers, prepare classes, and conduct research. "Dropping in" usually results in the student feeling frustrated or irritated because the professor already has appointments scheduled.
2. *Ask your professor how he/she prefers to be addressed.* Not all instructors are Ph.D.'s (i.e., "Dr."), and thus may want to be addressed by their first names. But, check it out to be sure.
3. *If you make an office appointment, show up on time.* If you do show up on time and your professor isn't there, wait five or ten minutes (you'd wait longer in a physician's office), then leave a note. If you miss an appointment, apologize in person and reschedule.
4. *Adopt the attitude that your professor wants to help you.* Eliminate negative thoughts such as: "She'll just tell me it's my fault." "He requires too much work." "She uses trick questions on the test." Instead, tell yourself, "He can't solve my problem for me, but he can help me figure out what I can do." "She can help me understand how to study for her tests, so that I can do better."
5. *Be prepared for the meeting.* Know exactly what you want from your professor. Write out what your problem is and what you want. Come up with options BEFORE you meet with your professor. Then he/she can help you decide if those options are possible.
6. *Questions about course content.* Be specific when you meet with your instructor. Examples of appropriate questions are: "I read Chapter 3 and reviewed my notes on the cranial nerves, but I still need some help on how to perform certain tests," or "I really want to learn how to perform these cranial nerve tests and apply them to my clinic experience. What suggestions do you have that can help me use this technique better?" (Show the instructor your notes.) "I watched you demonstrate them in each class and took good notes, but I still need a better understanding of a few of them—especially the trigeminal nerve."

7. *Needing additional help.* Professors are the best source of advice for how to succeed in their classes. If you are investing sufficient study time and still not doing well, schedule an office appointment. Be honest and communicate non-defensively. Let your professor know what you are already doing (how many hours you spend reading, reviewing notes, studying with other students, etc.). Discuss your specific concerns: "I can get the right answer but not when I use the method shown in class;" "I do okay on the quizzes but seem to blank on the tests;" "I read the material before each class, but I'm having difficulty connecting it with the information in the lecture," etc. Ask the instructor what else you can do to succeed in the class.
8. *Appealing a poor grade.* If you are appealing a poor grade, come prepared with ideas of extra work you are prepared to do: "I am really concerned about my grade in this course. I know I am responsible for my grades, but I would really like another opportunity to improve my grade in this class. Is there any way that I can earn extra credits such as doing a research paper on a related topic?"
9. *Concerns about tests.* Remember, do not be defensive or hostile toward the instructor: "I am really upset about my performance on the last test. I studied two hours a night for a week before the test and reviewed all the readings and notes with a study partner. But, when it came time to take the test, none of the questions seemed to be related to the material I had studied. I want to do better on your tests. Can you give me some suggestions?"
10. *Asking for an incomplete grade or other special exceptions.* The most important thing to remember here is that students who have valid reasons and the proper attitude will have fewer problems receiving extra time to complete work or getting other special exceptions. Make sure that you are very clear with the instructor, and be honest.