

GUIDELINES FOR SEEKING ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE

Jody Millward, Ph.D.

Resources: Classmates; Study Groups; Classroom assistants; CAP Mentors; Tutors; Faculty

Research on how we learn and retain information suggests the most effective learning strategies include discussing information with others and teaching information to others—that is why it is important to seek outside assistance. You are all busy, however, as are your resources. The key is to manage your time and make effective use of your resources' time. If possible, make an appointment or attend an office hour (but budget for the possibility of another student getting there before you).

Treat your resources with respect. **DO NOT EXPECT INSTRUCTORS, TUTORS, OR MENTORS TO BE ON 24-HOUR CALL.** If at all possible, use the times they have scheduled to assist students. If it is impossible for you to make those times, inform the instructor and make it clear you are more than willing to meet at ANY other time that is convenient—even if this means you must drive to campus on a day you normally wouldn't or you need to come earlier or stay longer than you normally do. If an instructor is absent during the first office hour you attempt to see him or her, wait at least ten minutes. Do not assume the instructor is "never there." Do not begin your next conversation with the instructor (or other resources) with such phrases as "I stopped by your office, but you weren't there" or "Where were you?" or "I couldn't find you." If the instructor consistently misses his/her office hours, you may want to check with the department chair or dean. Remember, there may be a very good reason why s/he is absent once or twice in the semester.

What follows is advice on how to get the most out of your sessions with faculty, mentors, tutors, classmates.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

PREPARATION FOR THE MEETING

1. Review the language of the assignment.

- Underline the key words (see handout on key terms);
- If the assignment suggests steps to follow, number those steps

2. Review your own work

- Identify which steps you have fulfilled
- Identify places where you made decisions and indicate why you made the choices you did
- If there is a section or a turning point where you feel particularly unconfident or where you are stumped, take a few minutes and write as specifically as possible what stumped you, where you are unclear—in the margins; use a different color pen to draw your attention to problem areas

3. Prepare what areas you intend to cover in the meeting

- write a brief summary of what you understand and the progress you've made
- specifically identify your area of confusion and try to form questions about that material
- try to determine if you are having difficulty with understanding the directions, understanding a concept, or understanding specific content

THE MEETING

1. **Organize your materials before you walk into the meeting.** Make sure you have
 - A copy of the assignment
 - A pen and paper to take notes (try color coding pens—your meeting pen should be in a different color)
 - A copy of your work thus far
 - Questions prepared on your area of concern
2. **Take control of the meeting.**
 - Briefly summarize what you have done well thus far
 - Present the questions you would like to ask
 - Take notes while the resource is helping you; if possible, write on the “shared” paper, rather than on a separate sheet

POST MEETING

1. Take a few minutes to **summarize** or to note the most critical points discussed so that you will not forget them
2. Before completing the assignment, **review** what you achieved in conference
Apply what you have learned to completing the assignment

INEFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

1. Wasting time with general blame strategies; for example:
 - my instructor’s confusing or stating directly to the instructor, “The assignment’s not clear.”
 - my last instructor didn’t prepare me; or my last instructor was clearer
 - I’m not very good at this subject
2. Wasting time with a general plea for help, for example:
 - “Read this paper and tell me what you think”
 - “I don’t understand the last chapter.”
 - “Could you look at my homework and see if it’s okay?”
 - “I’m confused.”
3. Having the resource do your work for you; for example,
 - finish the math problems that have you stumped
 - rewrite portions of your essays or fix your grammar
 - correct your lab reports

All that this proves is that the resource can do what you yourself need to learn in order to pass that particular class.

- **Resist the urge to ask for such help;**
- **Resist the urge to accept such help from a resource who may get carried away with the amount of assistance s/he offers.**