

October's *Ask the Professor* comes to us from **James Miranda**, an Instructor in the English Department. As you will see, James is a strong advocate of using office hours to develop an interactive dialog with the instructor, so that you get the most out of your writing classes. His advice probably generalizes to all your challenging courses.

Here are some things that I always recommend for students coming in to take advantage of office hours:

1. I think there are two types of office-hour visits: a.) the informal--getting to know your prof meeting and b.) the I have a very specific question or concern meeting.
2. Both of these types of meetings are fruitful and necessary for students, I think. The first kind can help to bring down the wall between instructor and student in terms of accessing the course material and really understanding your instructor and their mode of teaching. Students who I engage with like this tend to do really well because it's a two-way street. They get a better understanding of who I am and what I am looking for in terms of my learning objectives for students; and I get a sense of who the student is and what they might need from me to succeed in the class. Without these informal meetings (which can always morph into some more specific course-related questions/concerns), it would be easy to go through a whole semester and only really know a student by their writing, particularly if they are not very inclined to participate in class discussion.
3. The second type of meeting is more structured and has specific objectives (for both student and instructor). In this kind of meeting, students should bring specific questions about course projects/assignments/texts (preferably written down in advance) so that we can work our way through them methodically. It's also very helpful for students to bring outlines, notes, drafts, or some kind of concrete writing that we can go through together. This allows for very concrete feedback that will help the student in a practical sense once they are on their own again and facing the blank page. Without this, it's easy to get back to your room or the library or wherever and be like, "wait, what did he say?".
4. I also recommend "becoming a regular." I always have a few students each semester who drop by during my office hours almost every session. It becomes a pattern in their academic process--a place to digest and rehash in-class material, to make connections to things outside of class, to refine and clarify material in their own heads, and we establish a relationship that makes working with the student's writing familiar and helpful. These students always always always do well in my courses.

I think that's all that I can think of. I hope it's helpful for the project, and let me know if you have any other questions.