

Our latest addition to the Ask Your Professor/Tutor section is from Dr. Mary Beth Voltura. We are excited to get Dr. Voltura's suggestions. She has a great reputation around campus as someone who teaches challenging classes in Biology, and as someone who works hard to make sure her students are successful. She provides simple, common-sense ideas for getting the most out of your classes. Thanks for asking for my input! I teach non-majors biology (BIO110) and so have taught a LOT of students in my time at Cortland. Helping students be successful is one of the most rewarding parts of my job, but success may look different for each student. When students come to my office for help in my course, or for general guidance, I always try to get to know them first. Why did they choose their major? What are their strengths? Their favorite classes? How do they feel about taking my class?

I like to ask students their concerns – what are they most worried about? I always think it helps to figure out what is working and what isn't working for them. Every student is different, and all that matters is the particular student I'm helping at that moment. Everyone has unique struggles.

Most of the time when students come to my office hours, they are concerned about test scores. There are two important elements in doing well on a quiz or exam – the preparation before the exam and the actual taking of the exam. Some students prepare well in advance, but either struggle to know what the professor is asking, or get test anxiety that affects their performance. These students are often frustrated after exams because they felt like their score didn't reflect their knowledge. So we discuss using 'practice techniques' to get ready for tests. It's okay to ask your professor how you will be assessed in their course! If you have that information, you can be better prepared. Use your experience on the first test to improve for the next one – going over your exam with your professor is an excellent way to do this! The Learning Center is a great place to get help with test anxiety.

Other students need help with preparing for tests. For those students, I ask them how they are currently studying, and help them find ways to better prepare. Attendance in class is critical, and so is taking good notes. But a lot of students then simply study by re-reading their notes or looking over flash cards. These are very passive modes of learning. I encourage students to find active ways of reviewing material. Practice writing out definitions. Create outlines of important information. Write potential test questions! Think about how you will be assessed, and get ready by practicing. And don't be discouraged if you struggle with the material – it's part of the process. Just like getting ready for a stage performance or an athletic competition!

If students learn to draw on the skills they already have, and develop some new ones, they can be more successful in their classes. Reach out to your professor – it's part of our job to assist students outside of class and sometimes one-on-one help makes all the difference in the world.

Dr. Mary Beth Voltura

