Communication in College, Part 1

In-person Communication

You’ll spend approximately 250 hours per quarter with your instructor and your classmates for a regular five-credit class, not counting the time you spend on Canvas responding to discussions and sending emails. If you aren’t communicating with the people around you, you’ll miss many important benefits of being in the classroom.

If you’re a shy person, however, sometimes it’s hard to figure out how to communicate. The three biggest ways instructors and students communicate in person are in-class discussions, office hours, and conferences.

## In-class discussions

Most teachers want to hear from you. It’s important for you to become comfortable talking to classmates, asking questions, and contributing to discussions in small and large groups. Participating in discussions is great once you stop being shy! Gaining new knowledge and learning things from people different from you is one of the best parts of college.

### Guidelines

* **Step up, step back**
  + If you don’t speak in class or in discussions a lot, challenge yourself to say one thing in each discussion. Once you become more comfortable, challenge yourself to say two things, and so on.
  + If you tend to speak in class a lot, challenge yourself to encourage others to share as well. Don’t take over a conversation, because that discourages others from speaking.
* **Speak up**
  + Speak loudly enough for others to hear. Pretend you’re speaking to someone across the room.
* **Don’t get distracted**
  + Put your phone and your other homework away. Think about how you’d feel if someone was playing on their phone instead of listening to you.
* **Make eye contact with the person who is speaking**
  + In a class discussion, give respect by looking at the person who’s talking. You don’t always need to look at the teacher. (It’s weird to be stared at all the time!)
* **Do your work beforehand**
  + When discussing a reading or an assignment, make sure you’ve done that assignment **before** you come to class. Others are relying on you to do the work so they can get their work done.
* **Explain yourself**
  + Use evidence to support your ideas. Show how smart you are by referring to the class reading or something you’ve read or seen outside of class. Don’t make statements that you can’t support.
* **Be respectful, especially when you disagree**
  + It’s fine to disagree with your classmates or your teacher. We’re different people, after all. It’s even important to tell someone when you disagree. If you do it respectfully, people will appreciate what you have to say.

## Office hours

At Highline, instructors try to be as available to students as possible. Instructors are required to have office hours where students can visit them with questions or concerns about the class. These office hours are for **you**, so use them! It helps if you come with **specific** questions. Read the guidelines for conferences below.

## Conferences with the instructor

Almost all English instructors, and many other instructors, ask students to do conferences. These are scheduled appointments that give you a chance to talk to your instructor about a project or assignment. Take advantage of these conferences even if they aren’t required. Students often report that one-on-one time with their instructors is the most valuable tool for getting specific, useful help with their writing.

This is only true, though, when **you** come to your meeting prepared, confident, and ready to **lead** the conversation. Remember: a conference with your instructor is like anything else, in college especially: the more you put into it, the more you’ll get out of it. Make the most of your valuable one-on-one time with your instructor by coming prepared to **ask** questions, **lead** the discussion, and **be** an active and engaged learner. Remember that your teacher cannot do the real work for you; it’s up to you to do the work of preparing for a successful meeting. You’ll be glad you did!

### Guidelines

* Come prepared with **specific, active questions**. It might help to write them down.
  + These questions are too **passive** (general): “Can you read my whole essay and tell me everything that’s wrong with it?” “Can you read my whole essay and find/fix all of my grammar errors?” “Can you just read it and tell me what you think?”
  + These questions are **active** and **specific**, and are therefore appropriate to ask in a one-on-one session with your instructor: “I’ve been stuck on paragraph 3, and how to connect the ideas logically. Can you help with that?” “I’m not sure if I’m incorporating quotations smoothly. Can you give me some guidelines on how to use quotes effectively?” “For these two body paragraphs, I’m not sure if my evidence is relevant to my topic. What do you think?” “I’m not sure how to express this idea fluently because I don’t have the phrases or vocabulary in English. Can you give me some language suggestions?”
* Come with a complete draft of your writing, or as complete as you can make it in time for your meeting. It’s best if you have already put in the time and effort to find/fix errors, make revisions, and made this draft the best that you feel you can make it so far. This will give me a better picture of what still needs improvement in your draft.

Come ready to write down what you discuss with your instructor. If you don’t write down the key points from your conversation, it might be hard to remember what your instructor said. Make sure you take notes.

Communication in College, Part 2

Online Communication

Most professors at Highline use email as their main way to communicate with students outside of class. Many also use Canvas email and discussion forums.

## Email guidelines

* **Check your email twice a day**
  + Check once in the morning and once in the afternoon or just before you leave campus. Sometimes, professors will email you with important information, and you’ll want to get that information as soon as possible, right?
* **Read your syllabus!**
  + Read the syllabus before emailing your professor with a question. Many questions about course policies and grading are answered in the syllabus. If you still have a question, write, “I’ve checked the syllabus for \_\_\_\_, but I’m still wondering/still confused about \_\_\_\_.”
* **Write a clear subject heading when sending an email**
  + Your reader should know exactly what the email is about. [no subject] or “Class” or “Question” are not specific.
* **Use a greeting**
  + “Hello \_\_\_\_” or “Hi \_\_\_\_” is fine in many situations; most Highline professors don’t mind. A more formal greeting is, “Dear Professor \_\_\_\_.”
* **Tell your reader exactly what you want**
  + What are you asking for? What do you need from your reader? Tell your reader in the first sentence or two what you’re requesting.
* **Respect your reader’s time**
  + Most instructors and employers check email during the day but not at night or on weekends. Don’t expect an answer within an hour.
* **Don’t send repeated emails**
  + If you don’t receive a response from your instructor within **a few days**, you can send a follow-up email **if** you haven’t spoken to that instructor in person. Otherwise, don’t send repeat emails. Your instructor will respond as soon as they can.
* **Don’t ask, “Did you get my email?”**
  + Instructors sometimes receive 30-40 emails per day. They probably received your email, but they may not remember what the email was about. Remind them! You can say something like, “I’m just checking to make sure you got my email asking about my letter of recommendation.” Most instructors don’t mind this; it can help remind them to look at the email again.
* **Don’t ask, “Did I miss anything**?”
  + Yes. You did.

# Teacher Resources

## Student Communication Scenarios

Give these scenarios to groups of students after reading your communication guidelines and ask them to discuss how they would communicate with the teacher.

* You were 15 minutes late to class today. When you walked in, you weren’t sure what was going on, and now you’re very confused. What should you do?
* You couldn’t come to class today, and you’re not sure what you missed. What should you do?
* You’re not sure why you got a 13 out of 15 points on your last assignment. What should you do?
* You got a grade you’re not happy with on your last essay. What should you do?
* You’re doing a group project, but you’re not sure what to do next, and you can’t contact any of your groupmates. What should you do?
* You’re doing a group project, but you feel like you’re doing all the work. What should you do?
* You’re feeling lonely in class. You talk to your classmates sometimes, but you feel like you don’t have any friends in class. What should you do?
* You’re feeling lonely in class, but you’re too scared to talk to anyone. What should you do?
* You’re completely lost and confused about what’s going on in class. What should you do?
* You’re not sure what the homework is for tonight. What should you do?
* You have a question about something the teacher just said, but by the time you figure out how to ask, the teacher is talking about something else. What should you do?
* You skipped class a few times and missed a few assignments. You feel confused now because you’re behind everyone else, and you don’t know what anyone is talking about. What should you do?
* You’re worried about your grades in the class. You’ve missed a few assignments, and you’re worried you can’t catch up. What should you do?

## Bad email scenarios

*Subject*: hey

Can u tell me what i missed in class yesterday i slept thru my alarm

thanks

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*Subject*: help!

Dear Professor,

I’m really confused about what we did in class today. I don’t understand it at all. Please help me understand???

Sincerely,

X

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*Subject:* [no subject]

Can I please get some extra credit I know I didn’t do so well on the last couple assignments but I really need to pass this class to graduate pleeeaaaase?

THANKS!!!!!!

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*Subject*: Class yesterday

Hi Professor,

I missed class on Thursday. Can you tell me what I missed please?

Thanks, X

*Subject:* My grades in class

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Dear Professor,

Why did I get a 65% on my last essay? I worked really hard on it, and I think I did pretty well. I deserve at least a passing grade. I think you made a mistake. Please correct it.

X

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*Subject:* hey

Hey,

I feel very sick today and I think I need to stay in bed. Please tell me what I missed.

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*Subject:* can i meet with you?

*Time:* 12:35am

DEAR PROFESSOR HELLO I AM IN YOUR ENGLISH 91 CLASS I WOULD LIKE TO MEET WITH YOU TO DISCUSS MY GRADE PLEASE RESPOND

*Subject:* can i meet with you???

*Time:* 1:46am

DEAR PROFESSOR I WOULD LIKE TO MEET WITH YOU PLEASE RESPOND

*Subject*: did you get my email??????

*Time:* 5:56am

DEAR PROFESSOR PLEASE RESPOND I NEED TO MEET WITH YOU

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*Subject*: Homework for tonight?

Hi Professor,

Can you please tell me what our homework is for tonight?

Thanks,

X

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*Subject:* Question about an English 91 assignment

Dear Professor,

Can you please tell me whether we need to add a title to Essay 1? I read the assignment description and the syllabus, but I didn’t find that information.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

X

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*Subject*: Absent on Thursday for an appointment

Dear Professor,

I will be absent from class on Thursday because I have an appointment. I apologize for the inconvenience. I will check Canvas and ask my classmates for any information I might have missed. If I’m still confused, I’ll visit you in your office hours.

Thank you,

X

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*Subject:* Question about a grade in English 91

Hi Professor,

I noticed that I have a zero for the grammar worksheet that was due on April 28th. However, I have a copy that you graded, and I got four points. Can I show it to you, and would you mind changing the grade?

Thank you!

Sincerely, X

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*Subject:* My grade in English 91--may I meet with you?

Dear Professor,

I have some concerns about my English 91 grade. May I make an appointment with you to talk about it?

Thank you for your time. Please let me know when it’s convenient for you to meet.

Sincerely,

X