

Getting the Most Out of Office Hours

How do office hours work?

Your instructor will tell you when his or her office hours are held each week. These are times the instructor has set aside to meet individually with students to provide more personalized and focused instruction than is possible during class. You don't need an appointment; just show up at your instructor's office during the posted office hour times.

Why should you get help from your instructor in office hours?

Your instructor knows the course content better than your course assistants and classmates. He or she also has a better idea of the big picture of the course and can help you see connections between topics and between your current course and future courses.

An experienced instructor not only knows the course content well, but also knows how to teach that content well. He or she can tailor his or her explanations to your learning style and content difficulties. He or she can teach you how to solve a problem without just solving the problem for you.

Here are some reasons you might want to meet with your instructor during office hours.¹

- to get help or hints on an assignment
- to get clarification on a concept or idea
- to fill in gaps in your mathematical background
- to learn critical-reasoning and problem-solving skills
- to be noticed by your instructor and convey eagerness
- to get to know your instructor more personally
- to build confidence in your ability to do mathematics
- to discuss your progress or course policies
- to discuss problems with classmates or members of the teaching staff
- to give your instructor feedback on the course and the difficulty of the material

What about email?

Email is often a great way to get in touch with your instructor. It is best used when you have a brief question about an assignment, a course policy, or a particular homework problem. If the answer to your question is too involved, your instructor may ask you to meet with him or her during office hours for a full explanation.

¹ Matt Delong and Dale Winter, *Learning to Teach & Teaching to Learn Mathematics*, MAA Press, 2002.