

How To Get The Most Out of Office Hours

I have 4 office hours per week. These are drop-in hours, which means that you DO NOT need to make an appointment with me. Rather, these office hours are first come, first served.

M 12-1PM

T 2:30-4:30PM

Th 2:30-3:30PM

If you cannot attend my regular office hours, then please contact me so that we can make an appointment at another time. All appointments should be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Please read the guidelines below so that you make the most out of your meeting with me:

1) Get your draft done early. This means that you can show up to my office hours long before the final draft is due, so you will have plenty of time to make any revisions that we discuss. In addition, if you wait until the day before an essay is due to seek out feedback, you can be sure that there will be many other students who had the same bright idea as well, which translates into less time to speak with me.

2) Review the assignment guidelines before visiting me. This way you will either know what the assignment is, or you can ask me specific questions about aspects of the question that you do not understand.

3) Bring any relevant books, assigned readings, or research with you to the meeting. This will allow us to discuss relevant passages, which you can then annotate and use in your essay.

4) Prepare for meetings of 20 minutes in length. Think of 1-3 issues that you want to address when you show up to my office. We probably won't have time to review your entire essay. Choose specific issues that we can talk about in some depth in 20 minutes. You may have to come back and see me on another day if you have many questions, and/or you can visit the [Writing and Humanities Tutoring Center](#) (Drescher 313) for additional assistance.

5) Bring a (written) list of questions. Take the time to write down specific questions that you have of me. Then we can work our way through the list. Some students show up in my office and ask me to help them "fix" their papers. First, your essay is not broken, so it can't be fixed. Instead,

FACULTY FOCUS

HIGHER ED TEACHING STRATEGIES FROM MAGNA PUBLICATIONS

December 9, 2011

How to Make the Most of Your Office Hours

By: [Margaret Walsh, PhD.](#) in [Teaching and Learning](#)

[Add Comment](#)

Most faculty schedule at least three office hours per week—that's 2,700 minutes a semester. If you have 135 students, that's 20 minutes for each student. Even if you have 270, that's still 10 minutes per student.

Recently I've been working to make the most of these 2,700 minutes of office hours. They offer prime time for one-to-one mentoring. In the process, my thinking about office hours has shifted a bit, and I'm using my office hours in more ways. Consequently I have had a greater number of students taking advantage of this learning opportunity.

Two shifts in thinking

Rather than arbitrarily selecting any three hours during the week, I recommend selecting times that maximize the number of students who can meet with you during office hours, recognizing the constraints that today's college students face. They may be attending college part time, working full time and commuting to campus.

1. Timing. It's best to consult with your students before deciding when you'll hold office hours and then schedule times that are convenient for them. In all likelihood this rules out early Monday morning or Friday evenings, and that heavily scheduled 10 to 4 time window on Tuesdays and Thursdays (on my campus at least). I recommend three different weekdays, and I wouldn't rule out virtual office hours held at other times.

2. Staging. Move aside everything physically and psychologically that will interfere with devoting this time to students. If you share an office, stagger hours with your office mate. Use every way possible to let students know when you hold office hours; post them on your door, put them on the syllabus, position them prominently on the course website, announce them in class. Have a chair ready. Put away your cell phone. Turn away from your computer. Put peppermints in a bowl on your desk.

Seven ways to interact with students during office hours

1. Teach. Tell students that class attendance and note-taking is expected in your course, but also make clear that questions and additional help are available during office hours. Students sometimes think that professors are not willing to review content again in the office. I'm not suggesting that you do more than teach. Students are responsible for doing the hard work of learning, but you can certainly help them do that during office hours.

2. Advise. Students do come to faculty offices with forms that need to be signed. Make the most of this time by being more than a bureaucrat. Ask a few questions of your own. Listen to their concerns. What information does the student need to succeed in your program, beyond your signature?

3. Collaborate. If you encourage students to seek out additional sources on topics introduced in class and they bring material to your office, ask them about it. I am always surprised by how few students say that they are never asked direct and challenging questions about the interesting topics and projects they are working on. It's a chance to give them practice answering questions like, "What's your research question?" "What have you found so far?"

4. Offer books. Like me, you probably have a decent personal library. You may have some duplicate copies of key texts or know where you can buy used copies of the classics in your field. Lend them out or give them away. Geoffrey Canada, the charismatic school principal and subject of Paul Tough's *Whatever It Takes*, talks about a professor who gave him an unassigned statistics book from his personal collection. That book helped him pass the hardest course of his undergraduate major. My experience has been the same. I cherish those books given to me by my professors.

5. Listen well. Use all the active-listening strategies you've ever learned to make this meeting memorable. I recommend taking notes; jot down names, phrases, and details of the conversation so that you can refer to these topics next time you talk with the student. If you are meeting with several students on the same day, this kind of record keeping is essential.

6. Mentorship. Students do ask us questions about majors, careers, graduate school, and internships. Sharing your own educational and work trajectory can be very insightful. You can also direct students to alumni, library resources, and websites that will help them make their own decisions. If students need advice that is beyond your expertise, be prepared to say so. Know the phone numbers for student support services, and educate yourself so that you know when students need professional rather than academic assistance.

7. Student feedback. Don't put students on the spot and ask for specific feedback on your course or department. This can put students in a difficult position. Remember that office hours are for students' benefit. Keep every conversation professional.

2,700 minutes seems like a lot of time. It's good to reflect on how this interactive teaching time is being spent. Are there ways to make the experience more beneficial for students?

Margaret Walsh is a sociology professor at Keene State College in New Hampshire.

Reprinted from "Making the Most of 2,700 Minutes." [The Teaching Professor](#), 24.8 (2010): 3.