

What are office hours? (adapted from Cornell Learning Strategy Center)

Professors and teaching assistants schedule time outside of class to meet with students. These are called office hours. Office hours are times when you can meet with your professors and teaching assistants to discuss the material being presented in class or other related interests you have. Course-related discussions include asking for extra help, seeking clarification of material presented in class and following up on aspects of the class you find compelling. In addition, students also discuss majors and programs of study, and graduation requirements, as well as summer internships, graduate schools, campus events, and much more.

Most professors do not require that students attend office hours. They expect students to decide for themselves when they need or want to participate. Professors usually announce their office hours on the first day of class or on their print or web-based course material.

Most professors and teaching assistants do not have lessons planned for office hours. They expect students to “drive” these meetings with their questions and their thoughts. A good way to prepare for office hours is to attempt your homework and review your notes from class and from readings and identify as clearly as you can what you do not understand.

Do not be surprised when the professors and teaching assistants reply to your questions with questions of their own. They are working with you to uncover the source of your questions. Often they will ask students to show them their work and where they got stuck. They may ask you to explain what you were thinking as you moved from step to step. They may ask you to generate alternative ways to solve a problem. Hopefully they will help you change how you think about the material so that you can answer many different kinds of questions about it – not just the question on the homework that is stumping you. Don’t be surprised if they ask you to solve another problem before you leave the office.

What office hours are not

Office hours are not related to activities in high school that require students to stay after school. They are not detention or negative consequences for poor decisions. They are not a place where the instructor will do your homework for you.

What are my responsibilities as a student going to office hours?

To make the very most of your time with your instructor during office hours, you should:

1. Study your textbook and lecture notes thoroughly and attempt the assigned problems before you go to office hours.
2. Try to identify specific questions or concepts you need to address during the office hours.
3. Expect instructors to ask you questions about the material. They do this to find out what you understand, and to provide you with information and strategies tailored to your individual needs.
4. Be patient! Several students often come for office hours at the same time. If the instructor is especially busy, you may have to wait a little longer for individual assistance. Use this time to study the material.
5. Expect the instructor to suggest general study strategies to help you improve your overall academic performance. These strategies will help in all of your courses.
6. Avoid waiting until the day before the test or the day before an assignment is due to seek assistance. Study a few hours each day, and keep up with your assignments. It is EASIER to keep up than to catch up!
7. Use other resources such as formal study groups and informal homework-help groups.
8. Keep a positive attitude about the subject and about your potential to excel. Your attitude will go a long way in determining how well you do in the course!