Studies show that one characteristic of a successful student is the ability to effectively communicate their learning needs to instructors. However, students often wait until there is a problem before communicating needs. Once a problem has occurred, communication becomes more difficult because feelings of anger and frustration can block problem-solving and cooperation. To successfully communicate with your instructors, follow these steps:

Step 1 TAKE RESPONSIBILITY TO EDUCATE YOUR INSTRUCTORS REGARDING YOUR NEEDS

Letting your instructor know early in the semester about your needs shows personal responsibility. This can go a long way in enhancing the learning environment and creating a positive atmosphere when you need to speak with your instructor.

Step 2 FIND AN APPROPRIATE TIME AND PLACE TO DISCUSS YOUR SITUATION

1. Make an appointment with your instructor. Do not try to explain your needs as the teacher is rushing to or from class.
2. Give instructors time to meet your request; do not expect immediate or last minute results.
3. If you cannot find a meeting place (i.e., an office or café), schedule a time to talk by phone.

Step 3 PREPARE FOR THE MEETING AHEAD OF TIME

1. Identify what learning needs you have and how the instructor can help you meet those needs. For example, learning style (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). You may want to give examples of what has worked in the past as a starting place for determining what will work best now.
2. Be able to explain your strategies for learning and your plan to actively engage in the process.

Step 4 DURING THE MEETING

1. Go into the meeting with a positive attitude believing the instructor is there to help you.
2. Take turns speaking and listening without interrupting.
3. Summarize, clarify, and acknowledge what the other person says or feels.
4. Focus on the future, not the past (i.e., do not make statements like, “when instructors have not done what I have asked, I always end up failing because of them.”).
5. Let the instructor get to know you as a student by describing some of your study habits. This communicates that you take responsibility for your learning.
6. Look for creative solutions. Telling an instructor what has worked in the past should not imply that you expect the same from this instructor. This information should be used as a starting place to figure out what to do to meet your needs now.
7. If other concerns or questions arise, set up another meeting. Just because you have met once, does not mean you will not need to meet again.
8. If you have followed the suggestions for effective communication and are unable to work with your instructor, contact your DAS Specialist, the instructor’s supervisor or Student Life.

Step 5 FOLLOW UP WITH THE INSTRUCTOR THROUGHOUT THE SEMESTER

* Give the instructor on-going feedback regarding what is working well and commit to working together to find solutions if problems arise.

1. Learning is a continually changing process; do not be afraid to try new strategies and to ask appropriate questions in class. Try to be flexible and cooperative.

(Based on “Successful Conflict Resolution with a School” by Edward Achziger, Jr.)