

Let's Chat About... Your Must-Do Move After Mid-Terms

(Wonderful readers, as fall pushes forward, so does the college term. Here in Seattle, students only started classes toward the end of September, but many of you are in mid-terms already. Whether you're still transitioning into college or actively experiencing your first major exams, my advice this week is going to seem like a no-brainer. Take my words to heart: I'm making this recommendation because too few students actually do it and the impact for not taking this tip is huge! Read on and I hope you will comment at the end).

“But I *needed* a 3.5 in this class!”

“Is that really that my *final* grade?”

“Is there anything I can do about this?”

If I only had a quarter for every time I hear some variation of this statement at the end of a term!
The subtext is pretty transparent:

“Oh, crap! I didn't get the grade that I needed/wanted and now I am in deep doo-doo.”

I am continually amazed by how many students allow themselves to be blindsided by grades at the end of a term. Now that it's mid-term time, do **not** let the blindside happen to you! Right now, you have plenty of time to either:

- a) Keep working at the awesome grades you've already earned; or,
- b) Nudge a grade slightly higher to reach a certain goal; or,
- b) Try to save yourself from a poor grade or failure.

So what's the communication lesson? (Yes, we're back to it!)

It's time to make an appointment with your prof and find out where your grades stand!

Here's what you do:

First, **get your mid-term grade back**, if you have a mid-term. If you don't have a mid-term, then you can move right ahead...

Next, go to the syllabus and look at the points possible to date. Calculate your grade, either on paper, or go to the grade book in your course management system. (Editor's note: **Titanium**)

Take a breath... Are you celebrating? Are you freaking out?

Remember: If your grade is a heart-stopper in a bad way, there are still things you can do, but you must act now (more on that in a second).

The bottom line is that you have to know where you stand at this moment—while there is still time to make a plan of attack.

Now, it's time to talk to your prof... regardless of where your grade stands unless you are 100% certain that you are going to be able to maintain the grade you are desiring without any additional assistance or guidance. Not 100% certain? Keep reading...

E-mail or go up to your prof. Say, "I would like to make an appointment with you to discuss my grade. When is a good time to do that?" You can certainly also visit your prof during office hours, although in one case, I'm going to advise against waiting for that.

Now, you're sitting in your prof's office and one of three conversations is likely going to go down:

Talk #1—"My grade is fantastic! How do I keep it?"

You are probably doing just about everything right at this point—studying hard, turning in your work for early review, communicating with your prof... So, before you have this conversation, look ahead at what's due. Do you see a particular assignment, major paper, etc. that could threaten your grade? Time to discuss it!

"Professor, I checked my grade and things are looking good for me so far. I'm happy with my grade and intend to keep it. Do you have any particular advice so I can meet that goal?"

or

"I'm a little concerned that my grade might go down because of the term paper/final exam/assignment #3, etc. I'd like to do what I can to make sure that doesn't happen. What do you recommend? When should I check back with you to ensure that I'm on track?"

Talk #2: "My grade is not what I was expecting. What the heck's going on?"

Before you enter into this conversation, prep your documentation: You should have your assignments in hand, particularly any down-graded work (obviously, it's far better to talk about a less-than grade at the time that you receive the less-than grade, but having this discussion at mid-term is far better than at the end of the term).

Say, "I calculated my grade and it is lower than I was expecting. Can you double-check to see if my calculations are correct?"

A variation of this conversation may be: "I am currently slightly below a 'B', which is what I'm trying to get in this class. I'd like to discuss how my work needs to improve to increase my grade."

You can also say:

-“Am I missing any assignments?” (This definitely happens and the onus is always on you to follow up! The prof is not going to chase you down wondering why you didn’t turn in work. Also, if you are uploading or attaching to e-mail, technology can fail! The onus is still on you to make sure your work is in!).

-“Can you be more specific on why I received a lower grade on assignment 3? I should have asked you about it at the time you returned it, but I didn’t and I’m sorry about that.”

-“I’m hoping to still earn a ___ in this class. Do you believe that grade is possible? What do I need to do to make this happen? Can I have you look over work before I turn it in?”

-“I’d like to follow-up to see where things stand in a few weeks. Is there a particular assignment that should be graded first before I meet with you again?”

Talk #3: “My grade stinks. Can I save myself?”

Before this conversation starts, be realistic with yourself. Your chances of acing the term may well have passed. A “C” might be your celebration. Depending on how much work is left, an “I” might be another possibility. Or, you may make the decision, with your professor, to drop the class entirely. Regardless, if you don’t meet with your prof, you won’t know what your options are.

The success of this conversation is going to lie in what you are willing to do to remedy the situation. Your words have to indicate that you intend to be proactive between now and the end of the term.

Start by asking your prof: “Can I set an appointment with you to go over my grade? I think I might be failing the class or barely passing and I want to discuss my options.” I wouldn’t leave this particular meeting to office hours. Be direct about the nature of the meeting.

Two things you need to do to prepare:

-Have a list of your existing grades in hand so your prof can look at them with you. You will both need to analyze what assignments are left, and what you would need to earn in order to pass;

-Look at the schedule of upcoming work and make sure that you will be able to bring yourself up to speed, especially if you were behind on work.

Now, to have the discussion:

If you were **completely confused in the course** or **your work just wasn’t up to par**, now’s the time to get serious about getting help: “Professor, I’ve been struggling in this class and my grade shows it. I need extra help, if I can still salvage this class and pass it.”

If you **slacked off** and have decided to get serious, the reasons why don't matter, so don't make excuses. Instead, state intentions: "Professor, I haven't done my best to this point, but I'm determined to finish this course and hopefully pass it (Make sure you are clear that you realize your time may have passed for a high grade). I've reviewed the schedule and I've made notes about what is due and when. I would like to see if I can check in with you to stay on track as I'm meeting my deadlines."

You can also say:

- "Will you accept any work even though it is already late?" (Mention the late policy that exists in the syllabus. No promises here, of course, but you can ask).

- "Do you believe I can still pass this course? What kind of grades do I need to get on the rest of the work?" (Disclaimer: Your prof may not be able to answer this for you right now—you may need to check in again after a few more assignments are turned in).

- "Do you think it is in my best interest to drop this course?" (Only take this option if you and your prof determine that there is no possible way to recover! (Editor's note: that would have been Nov.16)

As important as it is for you to be proactive, it is even more critical that you are **accountable**. Remember, the prof doesn't have to give you any latitude whatsoever if you've just decided to care about work that you hadn't given a second thought to previously.

If you get help, an opportunity for a do-over, or a willingness for early review, do not miss one deadline and continue to follow up!

All that said, it is your prof's job to help you figure out your standing. Believe me, he/she will be so much happier to analyze the situation with you now, rather than pick up the grade pieces when the term is ending and nothing more can be done.

So, are you ready? Get through your mid-term, and **make that appointment**. I'd love to see a slew of comments at the end of this post saying "I did it!" (Meaning, you checked on your grades and discussed anything that you needed to with your prof. I'd even be happy if you just make the appointment!).

You're still reading? Don't you have some office hours or an e-mail address to look up? Hmm? Hmm???