



## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MEETING WITH YOUR PROFESSOR

### *AVOID...*

Karen needs clarification about the question her professor has set for her first essay. She thinks she knows what she wants to say, but when she meets him, she gets so nervous that everything flies out of her head and she spends five minutes making weak bleating noises before she gives up.

### *INSTEAD, WRITE...*

**A written list of questions** to ask the professor would have solved Karen's problem. This means that she won't forget to ask about something important, and it means that she will have something to say when the professor asks: "What can I do for you?" or "What seems to be the problem?"

### *AVOID...*

#### **The all-encompassing query**

Tony has been assigned a book review. When he meets his professor, he says, "I just don't understand the book." She sighs: this is the hardest kind of remark to respond to. It's like trying to answer the question "Can you explain calculus to me in about three minutes?"

### *INSTEAD, ASK...*

**Specific questions or specific statements** that defined Tony's problem would have demarcated the professor's task. Tony could have tried: "I'm not sure what the title of the book means in relation to the contents." Or "Why is this novel called an 'allegory'?"

### *AVOID...*

#### **The helpless handover**

Nicole asks her professor a question, and feels cheated when the professor responds with a question of her own. Doesn't the professor know the answer?

### *INSTEAD...*

**Working with the professor through the problem**, instead of putting it on the professor's plate, is what Nicole needs to do. What the professor is trying to do is break Nicole's question down into its elements, to help her arrive at an answer on her own. The professor believes that students learn better when encouraged to discover things for themselves.

*AVOID...*

**The forgetting**

The professor responds to Sean's difficulties with clear and exhaustive clarifications. Sean comes out of the meeting glowing with the light of understanding. Next morning it's all gone, including the name of that article the professor recommended.

*INSTEAD...*

**Taking notes** at the meeting, at least of the most important things the professor said, would have kept Sean's memory fresh. The professor wouldn't have been offended by Sean's scribbling, incidentally; she would have understood it as his way of showing that he valued the discussion.

*AVOID...*

**The bright, "YES, I UNDERSTAND" nod**

Britney thinks she will put the professor off if she asks him for a more elaborate explication of the idea he is explaining to her. Some of the terminology he uses is way over her head (was she supposed to know those words?), but she pretends to understand. She goes off and makes mistakes that show she was clueless.

*INSTEAD....*

**Asking for clarifications** would have helped Britney, and would have simplified things for the professor too.