

# How-To: Make the right first impression



Elon professors share their secrets on how to succeed as a student

Compiled by  
Anna Johnson  
Managing Editor

Elon University professors can be your greatest allies -- if you let them. But all too often, students find themselves in need of a letter of recommendation or extra help on tests without having established a meaningful bond with their professors. Making a great first impression at the start of the semester can help create those bonds. We've enlisted a variety of professors to give their best tips on how to make a great first impression and how to start the semester on the right foot.

For more professors' tips  
visit [www.elon.edu/pendulum](http://www.elon.edu/pendulum).

"Get on top and stay in control of your experience to assure a good outcome. Arrive at the first class session ahead of time and well prepared. If your professor has sent you information in advance, be sure to go over it before the first class and come ready with any questions you might have. Take notes at the first session and be sure you completely understand course expectations. Get ahead and stay ahead."

"One of the biggest mistakes students make is to wait until the last minute to do things. If you stay on top of things from the start, you will feel confident and in control of the workflow, if you last-minute everything it will show up in your performance. You will hate the course and you will not gain the full benefit from your experiences."

Janna Anderson  
Associate Professor of Communications

"Sit in the front, get to know your professors and always be passionately curious. Curiosity is the first step in discovering a love of learning and the freedom and joy that comes with asking questions, and asking questions that require deep thinking and may not always have answers."

Steven House  
Provost and Professor of Biology

"Don't be shy. The most important thing you can do if you're struggling with anything is to communicate this to your professor. Elon professors are compassionate and helpful folks, so speak up and come to office hours. We like visitors."

Sarah Glasco  
Assistant Professor of French

"Read the syllabus carefully before asking the professors any questions about the course. Many professors write detailed, specific syllabi designed to answer common questions. If you can't find the answer to your question there, ask away! Don't make travel plans now that necessitate leaving early for fall break or Thanksgiving break. Classes meet right up until the break starts; while most professors are happy to make accommodations for emergencies or religious observations, they are not and should not be expected to accommodate convenient travel arrangements."

Ann Cahill  
Chair and Associate Professor of Philosophy

"Professors love it when students ask good questions. But the questions have to be authentic, not forced and not off the topic. The question should communicate, by implication, that the student read the assigned material, made a serious effort to understand it, but is puzzled or curious about one especially difficult aspect of the reading. And listening to the answer is an important part of asking the questions, and it shows genuine interest."

David Cooper  
Dean of the School of Education, Professor of Education

"Whenever you stop to talk to a professor, always introduce yourself first. Give your first and last name, and continue to do that every time you talk to the professor until he or she actually learns your name (remembering names is not my strong suit, so any help I can get is appreciated). Do not be afraid to ask questions, particularly about the class. On the other hand, if the professor has asked a general question about the reading material or something shown in a projected image, do not simply say something for the sake of saying it, but put some thought into it. A student's reputation can be polished or tarnished in many ways, and some professors actually pay attention."

Richard Liebhart  
Adjunct Professor of Art History

"Ask your professor to coffee or lunch. (They'll end up paying for you.) Share your thoughts, questions, concerns and dreams relative to their class or discipline and/or to your college experience."

Tom Arcaro  
Professor of Sociology

"Our digital information age is wonderful; please don't misunderstand me. But there is simply no substitute for the person-to-person connection. At Elon, we are fortunate to have small class sizes, and to have an environment where it is possible for the faculty and students to connect on a very personal level. But you also have to extend yourself, as in any human interaction. Office hours are an under-utilized resource and so is that time right after class."

Jason Kirk  
Assistant Professor of Political Science