Asking Questions

“The important thing is not to stop questioning.” Albert Einstein
"No man really becomes a fool until he stops asking questions.” Charles Steinmetz

Good Reasons to Ask Questions

- **Learn more.** Asking questions is a way to fill in the gaps in your knowledge. Reading and other assignments are the primary source of information for online courses, so it is extremely important to complete each assignment. But reading assignments raises new questions. As you read, keep a list of questions to ask. If you do not find the answers in the assigned material, ask your instructor questions. Ask yourself what might happen if you don’t ask questions and get the information you need. In addition to affecting your performance on assignments and tests for the current class, your information gaps may affect you in more advanced classes or even, some day, on the job.

- **Save time.** Rather than wasting time trying to interpret unclear directions or, worse yet, completing tasks incorrectly, a good question get you back on track quickly.

- **Enjoy the course more.** Active learning is more enjoyable than passive learning.

- **Demonstrate your understanding.** Student questions help instructors set the pace by helping them determine if they are covering material too fast or well enough for you and others to understand.

- **Show you care.** Show your instructor you want to learn the course material and do well in the course.

- **Help the instructor get to know you.** Introducing yourself and continuing to interact individually with your instructor helps you become more than just another name and number.

- **Help others.** If you have a question, you can be sure other people in the class have the same question, but aren't willing to ask it.

- **Increase your self-confidence.** Once you've received your answer and understand, you’ll feel as though you have accomplished something, and you’ll be more confident in your knowledge of the course material.

- **Take control over your learning.** You have the power to obtain the information you need to be successful.

Can You Ask Too Many Questions?

The only time you should refrain from asking a question is if it has already been asked and answered.
Before asking a question:

- Read instructions and information provided by the instructor so you don’t waste the instructor’s time and the time of classmates on questions that have already been answered. Check for Frequently Asked Questions documents and discussion boards dedicated to common questions.
- Try to understand the material on your own first, so that your questions will indicate some level of understanding or at least an attempt to understand the material.

Why Don't You Ask Questions?

Many students find it hard to ask questions in both face-to-face and online classes. If this is true of you, identify the reasons you feel this way. Changing how you think about questioning may help you change this behavior.

- **You don't want to feel stupid.**

  These feelings are understandable. Many of us have had situations in the past where we felt uncomfortable because we didn't know all the answers. But now, as an adult learner, these feelings can prevent you from getting the assistance you need to be successful.

  Most instructors want to help you by answering your questions. If you have a question, it's very likely that another student has the same question. You won’t be the only one, and you're not going to look stupid for asking your question. In fact, other students may appreciate the help you have given them by asking the question. And the instructor is also likely to appreciate the opportunity to clarify the information on behalf of the entire class.

  It may also help to ask yourself, “What's the worst that can happen if I ask this question?” You might find that you feel uncomfortable for a moment as you ask your question, but once you get your answer, you've gained something well worth the small price you paid. Often asking one question makes it easier to ask a second question.

- **You want to understand things on your own without assistance.**

  Many of us prefer to try to understand without help from anyone else. In fact, this may be one characteristic that caused you to choose online learning in the first place – the fact that you are self-motivated and independent. So you don’t want to give up this trait altogether. However, it is important to remember that your instructors and even your fellow classmates can be of great assistance to you in the learning process, saving you time and preventing mistakes. One of the best ways you can enlist the help of others is by letting them answer your questions.

  It may help to view your instructor in the same way as you view a coach in sports. You are responsible for the task but the coach gives useful advice and pointers on how to improve. And remember, everyone needs help with something from time to time. In an online class, sometimes you will need the help. At other times, you'll be able to offer help to others.