

Keys to Academic Success in the US College Classroom

Attendance: Ithaca College students are required to attend classes and be responsible for any missed work due to absences. Professors often penalize students for missing class. Your attendance record may be a factor in your final grade, so make sure you are aware of the attendance policy for each class. Excessive absences may require that you withdraw from the class or risk failure. Likewise, professors expect you to be on time for class. Once class has started, professors do not appreciate people coming in late and potentially disrupting lectures, discussions, exams, presentations, or whatever else may be going on in the classroom.

Course Syllabus: Professors will provide you with a course syllabus at the start of the semester. The syllabus will always be available online, so make sure you consult it frequently. The syllabus explains all the information you need to succeed in the class, so pay very close attention to this document! Included in the syllabus will be a list of the materials required for the class, a course description, course objectives, course requirements – including quizzes, exams, and assignments – grading criteria, course policies, and the class schedule. Don't assume the professor will repeat information that is provided for you on the syllabus. Once you receive that document, you are essentially engaged in a course contract as outlined on the syllabus.

Class Participation: In addition to giving lectures, most American professors expect students to participate in class by answering questions and engaging in discussions. Professors will often prompt discussion by asking questions about assigned readings, points addressed during lectures, other students' comments, or even personal experience. Though you may be unaccustomed to such a classroom environment, it is important for you adapt to this expectation and do your best to participate in class. Professors regard such participation as a demonstration of your preparation for the class and your interest in the subject. Participation may even be a substantial part of your final grade for the class. Professors also sometimes assign group projects, which means you will be expected to work with other students in the class as a contributing member of a team effort.

Assignments: You will be given work to do outside of class for all of your courses. The types of assignments you receive will vary. It's common to be assigned a great deal of reading, which may make you feel overwhelmed at first if you are not a native English speaker, so be sure to allow yourself plenty of time to complete your reading assignments. It's also very common for professors to give various types of writing assignments. In order to receive a good grade, it's essential that you understand what is expected of you for writing assignments. Make sure you ask the professor for clarification if you are confused about an assignment. Also, the [Writing Center](#) on the first floor of Smiddy Hall provides help for students working on writing assignments. Additional support is available from the [Tutoring Services](#) Office. Though it may seem like a challenging task at first, do your best to keep up with all your assignments. If you get too far behind, you may not be able to catch up, and your final grade will be affected as a result.

Library Resources: The [IC Library](#) has many helpful resources available both in the building itself and on the website. When a professor assigns a research project for a class, the library is the place for you to get started. If you are not sure how to conduct research or use the library

resources, there are [reference librarians](#) who can offer you assistance and a comprehensive [Research 101](#) collection of guides and tutorials on how to get started with your research. Likewise, the library website provides all the information you need for [documenting your sources](#).

Plagiarism: According to the Ithaca College Standards of Academic Conduct, “Presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own is stealing, and it also betrays the trust of the professor who grades your work and your classmates who are judged on their own merits. Plagiarism covers a wide range of theft. It is not limited to books and articles, but includes music, lectures, websites, and materials in all media and formats. Whether you are working on a paper or a homework assignment, developing a presentation or a website, you are required to give credit to your sources.” Not doing so is an act of academic dishonesty, for which you can fail a course and potentially face dismissal from the college. Sometimes students plagiarize by mistake, without realizing that they have not cited sources correctly. But even such unintentional plagiarizing is never tolerated or excused. Please be aware that your professors consider plagiarism as a very serious offense, which is also true for American culture overall. If you're unclear about how to avoid plagiarism, you can review the [guidelines](#) and take a [quiz](#). And you can also get help with citation at the Writing Center.

Communicating with Professors: Last but not least, it is essential that you communicate with your professors with any questions or about any problems you are having with the class. You will notice that your American classmates frequently ask questions during class or approach the professor after class to ask questions. All professors hold office hours, as noted on the course syllabus, when you can stop by and talk to the professor privately. You can also email your professors with questions or concerns. Most American professors expect this kind of personal contact with their students and will admire your eagerness to do well in the class. If you are not a native English speaker you may feel self-conscious about speaking during class or with your professor personally. Keep in mind that there are many professors on this campus who are not native speakers, and they all experienced the same apprehension about first communicating in English as you may feel now. In general, you will no doubt find that Ithaca College and the town of Ithaca are communities that value the opportunity to welcome newcomers from all over the world.