

## 10 things to avoid saying to your professor

### 1. “You know what I mean.”

Of course, I have no idea what you mean. That is why you wrote something. If we had the power of telepathy, language wouldn't be necessary, but since we don't, I can only know what you wrote.

### 2. “I really need an A” (B, C, whatever).

How do you imagine this conversation going? “Well, you're doing C work, but if you NEED an A, well sure...” I can guarantee you, this has never been said by a college professor (and I sincerely hope it has never been said by a high school teacher either).

### 3. “I have a friend who is an English major and he said...”

Wow, this is wrong for so many reasons. First of all, you are insulting your professor. You are saying your friend who is an English major knows more about writing than the person teaching the class. This brings us to the second reason this is wrong: it's stupid. Your professor, in this case, has 8 years of college and graduate education devoted to English and 16 years of teaching experience and you're holding up a friend who has taken a few classes? Finally, it really doesn't matter how much education your “friend” has (I notice they rarely have names). You are writing for a purpose and an audience. The assignment describes your purpose and your professor is your audience. They define why you are writing. If the assignment says “do this” and your professor says “do this,” it really doesn't matter what anyone else has to say.

### 4. “In high school I always got As” (Bs, whatever).

Short answer: you're not in high school any more. There is a difference. Depending on the school you went to, it may be an extreme difference, but I guarantee you, more is expected in college than was in high school. That's why a college degree is worth something. If it was just like high school, why would anyone need or want to go?

### 5. “I really worked hard on this.” / “I put a lot of effort into this.”

This is a hard lesson, but the fact is it does not matter how much effort you put into an assignment. You are being graded on the outcome. Every activity is more difficult for some people than it is for others. The person sitting next to you in class may very well spend half the time you do on an assignment and get a better grade. The important thing is not how much effort you spent, but the quality of the result.

**6. “Well, that’s just the way I write.”**

Well, stop it. Seriously. One definition of insanity is doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result each time. If you keep writing the same way, and you keep getting grades that are lower than you want, try something different. For instance, you might try writing like your professor suggests. That is why you are taking the course, after all. If you already knew the best way of doing the work, you wouldn’t need to be in the class.

**7. “I wasn’t in class; did I miss anything?”**

“No, you didn’t miss a thing. We had a moment of silence to mourn your absence and then we all went home.” Of course you missed something! The question you are trying to ask is “What did I miss in class?” This, by the way, is a very good thing to say.

**8. “I couldn’t get the assignment done because I had a big test in another class.”**

You just told your professor that another class was more important to you than the one he or she is teaching. Do you imagine they feel very good about you right now and are probably just looking for a way to give you a break? I don’t think so. You are responsible for your schedule. You decided which classes to take during the same semester, and when you did so, you made the statement that you could successfully accomplish them all. If you find you can’t, decide which class to drop.

**9. “Well, I don’t think comma splices (organization, topic sentences, following directions, whatever) should be worth that many points.”**

This is a lot like number 3. You are telling the teacher his or her criteria should be thrown away in favor of yours. Why, exactly, would your professor want to do that? If you want to know why a particular aspect of your assignment is considered important, by all means ask, but don’t be so presumptuous as to march in and tell your professor you know how to teach better than he or she does. Besides, any “I think” statement is weak and easy to dismiss with “I think you are wrong.”

**10. Passing the buck: “My boyfriend was supposed to put my paper in your mailbox” / “My cable provider has really unreliable internet service” / “The drop box is really hard to understand” / etc.**

Look at the name at the top of the paper. It’s yours, right? That is who is getting the grade, and that is who is responsible for getting the work done. If you choose to rely on someone else, that is **your** decision, and **you** are still the one who is going to suffer the consequences should they let you down. Likewise, you chose to take an online class. That assumes a certain basic level of familiarity and skill with navigating a web page.