

■ Introduction:

Why I Wrote This Book

Having taught for many years at the university level, I thought I could no longer be surprised by what students needed and wanted the most help with. I maintained a checklist of things students need to not just survive—but also thrive—in a post-secondary setting. Of course, my checklist is always evolving.

When I moved to teaching at the university level, I learned that students were not prepared for 50-minute lectures, so I developed textbooks and materials to better prepare them to be true academic listeners (*4 Point: Listening for Academic Purposes*, 2016). I also realized they struggled with communicating in social contexts, many having never been in a setting requiring them to communicate effectively with professors, peers, and colleagues, so I wrote a speaking textbook focusing on this type of language (*Speaking in Social Contexts*, 2018). I also knew that students did not have nearly as large a vocabulary base as they needed because they seemed to know only words from the Academic Word List and/or they had memorized every word on the GRE® vocabulary list; to deal with this I prepared vocabulary strategies (*4 Point: Reading for Academic Purposes*, 2016) to help them. You will study listening, speaking, and vocabulary if you take English classes.

My checklist of topics to cover when teaching university coursework was compiled after teaching countless classes from the beginning of my second language teaching career, holding 12 years' worth of office hours at Stanford University, and having many solicited meetings with students I called on to inform my teaching, course materials development, and textbook writing. I always want to be teaching what students actually want and need to know, and not simply what teachers and writers think students want and need to know. This book is a result of those classes, office hours, and meetings. It is what my students told me they wanted and needed.

There are things you can do to prepare yourself for academic listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. A myriad of published books includes skills, strategies, and practice to help you prepare for the academic classes you will take at a university in a college setting. However, one thing students have discussed with me over and over again is not covered in any textbook—what to do or say during office hours with a professor or TA. A few examples include things like:

- not knowing how to greet the professor (do you use a title, do you use a formal greeting?).
- being unsure which words to use (to ask for advice, seek help, explain an absence).
- not knowing whether or not to sit down.

- not having an idea of how to properly word an email message asking for an appointment or explaining an absence.
- not following the cues professors or TAs were using to indicate the office hour was over and that it was time to leave.
- not being properly prepared to be a TA and manage your own office hours.

My students often shared stories about their interactions with professors/instructors during office hours. These stories struck me because students tended to ask about office hours during my speaking classes or during a meeting with me after a failed or awkward office hour interaction with another professor or TA. The types of office hour visits my students talked about ranged from one-on-one meetings with professors or TAs to going to office hours with other students; they also asked about online office hour interactions, either as an individual or in groups, such as the ever-growing popularity of office hours held via Zoom, course (learning) management systems, or other video services.

I also recognized that students often struggled during office hours with me, and I'm the sympathetic communication instructor who is there to help. One thing I noticed was that my students were not afraid to talk to me, but they were not handling the office hour interaction the "right" way. If they were struggling during a meeting with the ESL instructor, then what was happening when they met with professors in their general

education, major, and upper-level graduate classes who were not as sympathetic to the challenges of being a new student at the university level? Those professors expect all students—regardless of what language they speak—to do the same work as everyone else in the class.

An important reason for writing the book was that the challenge of “office hours” is not just for second language speakers. Office hours are a unique speaking event (or genre) for everyone. It’s not just students from other countries who speak other languages who struggle with knowing what to do and not to do during an office hour meeting with a TA or professor. **The university office hour interaction is new to everyone who attends a university.** This event is something that all college students need to learn to navigate.

Thinking about how I could help them as a college instructor reminded me of something my mother always told me about taking my vitamins and drinking my orange juice or what my dad always said about going to the dentist when my teeth didn’t hurt: You want to do these things to prevent the problems, not do them after you have the problems. When it came to office hours, I wanted all students to be better prepared for an office hour regardless of who it was with. I wanted them to be prepared in advance; I wanted to help them avoid the failed interaction altogether. And I wanted TAs to feel more comfortable and be better at their jobs while also better navigating their own office hours with professors they work for or professors they meet with.

Because many of my students were going to be TAs and were going to be holding their own office hours and because all students would eventually have to attend an office hour in some form or fashion, I decided to start teaching office hours as part of one of my academic speaking classes at the university. I began thinking about the language and structure—yes, structure—of an office hour. I realized that if students realized that office hours followed a certain structure and if they could learn the associated language needed for each part of that structure, they could manage office hours more successfully. Hence, this overview of office hours was born.

This book will teach you what office hours are and how they are used, introduce you to the five parts of an office hour, and present the language you will need for each of those five parts—both as a student using office hours or as a TA holding office hours. I have included some general do's and don'ts to keep in mind as guidelines when preparing for or reflecting on an office hour. Pronunciation notes are offered as well. For current and prospective TAs, boxes titled **Reflections for TAs** pose questions designed to help you manage your job and better serve your students and the professors you work for. Using all these materials should ensure that all participants start, progress through, and end each office hour positively.

I also believe that the language and strategies in this book can extend beyond what you study independently or in a classroom. They can extend beyond what you read or experience in campus office hours and be

applied to professional contexts, such as meetings with bosses and colleagues, or in a variety of other contexts such as appointments, seminars, conferences, or business/social dinners/ events.

Four video clips (available for free online) accompany this book (www.press.umich.edu/elt/compsite/offficehours). Two video analysis tasks are integrated into the chapters, and two appear at the end of the book as capstones. Transcripts and analysis questions are included in the book.