

Tips for Joining a Research Team

Many students would like to join a research team; unfortunately, there are more interested students than research positions, so professors are selective about who they invite onto their teams. Your behaviors and performance in your classes influence whether professors will consider your application to be a research assistant. We have provided some dos and don'ts for helping you improve your chances of joining a research team.

DON'T:

- **Call your professor Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss.** The correct title is "Professor" or "Doctor." Do not use first names either, unless the professor has indicated that they prefer it.
- **Arrive to class late or leave early.** This can indicate to your professor that your education is not one of your priorities. If you do need to arrive late or leave early, you should let your professor know ahead of time.
- **Eat, sleep, text, or read newspapers in class.** Even if a professor does not comment on it, they probably notice your behavior. Students who do these things in class are not typically good candidates for a research assistantship.
- **Behave rudely.** When students ask, "Is this going to be on the test?" or "I didn't come to class yesterday, did I miss anything important?" this implies that students don't value learning, or don't think class time is valuable.
- **Behave unreliably.** When research assistants forget appointments or meetings, or fail to meet deadlines, it affects everyone in the lab. Faculty are wary of students who miss lots of assignments or appointments, so try to demonstrate you are dependable in your classes. If you know you are going to be late or miss a meeting or assignment, reach out to your professor as early as possible. If you find you miss a lot of appointments or assignments, focus on ways you can keep better track of your schedule through reminders, to-do lists, or other tools.
- **Nitpick for class points.** Asking a professor to correct a mistake in the gradebook is fine, but arguing over docked points suggests to a professor that you are not actually interested in learning, but rather that you are motivated by earning grades. The point of research is to learn, so students who are primarily concerned about grades will not do well in a research lab.
- **Complain about the class.** While most faculty will be open to feedback on their course, complaining about study guides, difficult tests, or class policies tends not to impress professors.
- **Complain about other faculty.** Remember that other faculty members are your professor's colleagues and, potentially, friends. Gossiping or complaining about them reflects badly on you.

DO:

- ***Perform well in your classes.*** Many students want a spot on a research team, and many of those students have good grades. If you are interested in joining a research team, you will need to have As and Bs in your psychology classes to be competitive, especially in Statistics and Research Methods & Design.
- ***Be engaged in class.*** Effective research assistant candidates should be excited about learning. Asking thoughtful questions, participating actively in class discussions, and doing well on your assignments shows that you have a passion for learning. Stopping by and talking with your professor about research or topics you both find interesting can show you are engaged and interested.
- ***Be honest and ethical.*** Because you may be dealing with human subjects in research, faculty are very concerned when a student acts unethically. Students who lie, plagiarize, or break classroom or university policies do not belong on a research team.
- ***Take responsibility.*** Part of learning is making mistakes. If you have an emergency, or if you will be unable to finish an assignment on time, you should let your instructor know as soon as possible. If you make a mistake, you should admit it right away. Research assistants make mistakes from time to time, but when they don't ask for help, or when they try to hide their mistakes, it can ruin a study.
- ***Be proactive.*** If you do not understand something in class, be proactive about understanding it. Ask questions, visit your professor's office hours, review your exams and papers to see where you have made mistakes, and earn available extra credit. As a research assistant, it will be important to make sure you understand the research and to ask for clarification and additional resources when you are confused.
- ***Do your homework.*** Not just for your classes, but when you talk with professors. Before you approach a professor about becoming a research assistant, make sure you know what their research interests are, and be prepared to tell them why you will be an effective research assistant.
- ***Remember that professors are people too!*** We like it when students remember our names, say hello to us in the hallways, and tell us that they enjoy our classes. It means a lot to your professors when you say "Thanks! You've really taught me a lot!"