

Getting Somebody to Do Something...the *right* way

SITUATION: A student comes to Mr. Mr. MacStein's office with homework that is one day late. He wants Mr. Mr. MacStein to accept the homework. What do you think Mr. Mr. MacStein will say in each dialog? (The answers are on the back.)

A

Student: Mr. MacStein, this is my homework.
Mr. MacStein: So?
Student: It was due last class.
Mr. MacStein: ...

B

Student: Mr. MacStein, I see you're busy, but I wonder if I could have a minute of your time.
Mr. MacStein: Certainly. How can I help you?
Student: Thank you. I did my homework on time, but I forgot to bring it to class. Would you mind accepting it now?
Mr. MacStein: ...

C

Student: Mr. MacStein, I see you're busy, but I wonder if I could have a minute of your time.
Mr. MacStein: Certainly. How can I help you?
Student: Thank you. This is the homework that was due yesterday.
Mr. MacStein: ...

ANSWERS

A: "So?"

Whenever you want to talk with somebody in such a situation, preface your business with acknowledgement that the person is busy and a request for the person's attention. Avoid hints (some students only show the paper!). Tell the person the point of your visit. Don't make the person ask and guess.

B: "All right, but try to remember to turn it in on time in the future."

This is the best of the three dialogs, because the student

- 1) prefaced his business with the appropriate language,
- 2) told the person first what the person should hear first (in this case, the person needed to hear the fact that the homework was done on time, because it will prevent him from getting a negative attitude),
- 3) explained the situation ("forgot"), and then
- 4) presented his request in appropriate language.

C: "So?"

Again, don't make the person guess.