

STF Guide: How to Talk to Campus Decision-Makers

As a student-led club on a high school campus, you will often find yourself needing to talk to or ask favors from teachers and administrators. Talking to people in power (in your case, a teacher or administrator) is a special skillset. These skills will continue to aid you well past high school.

Tips for a Successful Conversation

1. Be realistic with your expectations.
 - a. Educators are busy people! This does not mean that they won't want to help you but approaching them with this understanding shows that you respect their time and capacity to help.
2. Set a clear goal for your conversation.
 - a. Because educators are busy, ample planning prior to your conversation is crucial. Consider what you'd ultimately like to ask of this person, and make sure you get to this question efficiently.
 - b. If you only have time for a quick conversation, use this format:
 - i. Greeting—>Introducing the Topic—>Explaining the topic—>Explaining the Goal
 - ii. "Good afternoon, Ms./Mr./Mx. [Name]! I wanted to talk to you about [topic]. This is regarding [explain the topic]. Can you help us [explain the goal]."
3. Practice beforehand!
 - a. It is always helpful to practice before diving into the actual conversation. Ask a fellow STF member to role-play as your teacher, and practice explaining STF (if they don't already know who you are), your topic, and your goal.
 - i. For instance, if you're putting on a tent event and want to invite a teacher who has no idea what STF is nor what it does, you'll need to explain that:
 1. Context: STF is a student-led club on campus that works with Human Rights Watch to advocate for human rights and the rights of children. You will also need to explain your current campaign and advocacy goal.
 2. Topic: An STF tent event is an interactive educational experience where teachers sign up their students to learn about and immerse themselves in the campaign and have an opportunity to take action.
 3. Goal: STF would like to invite them to bring all of their classes through the STF tent event on [date] at [location]. You can follow up with them in an email to give them more of the specifics.
4. Maintain conversation etiquette.
 - a. Maintain eye contact throughout the conversation—it shows confidence and builds trust.
 - b. Be respectful and **remember to say "please" and "thank you."**
 - c. Actively listen and take notes of what the teachers says and how they respond to your questions/statements. This will help guide your next steps.
5. After the Conversation
 - a. Write down any mental notes or key takeaways from the conversation.
 - b. Reflect on how the teacher engaged in the conversation:
 - i. Maybe they didn't have any answers to your questions but seemed supportive of your goal.
 1. This would be a good sign to keep in contact with this teacher and keep building a relationship. It may be helpful in the future.
 - ii. Maybe their body language indicated they were busy or didn't see your topic as relevant:

1. Never rule out a teacher or contact after one meeting. Try out another conversation with them, but if they continue to seem reluctant, reconsider their role in your overall plan. Look for another teacher if there are others who teach the same target classes. If they are not “replaceable,” here are some tips:
 - a. Bring a friend (preferably another student of the teacher) to join you for the next conversation. This shows that other people are passionate about the issue.
 - b. Be empathetic with the teacher and try to see the situation from their point of view. Ask them why they may not support your plans or agree with you.
 - c. Propose a solution that benefits both parties. Gather input from the teacher and craft a solution together.
- c. Follow up with any promised details in an email.

Tips for a Formal, Professional Meeting

Likely, when you talk to teachers, it'll be quickly in passing – whenever you can catch them free. Sometimes, however, you'll need to have a more formal, sit-down meeting with an administrator. Here are some extra tips to ensure you approach these meetings well-prepared and with professionalism.

1. Thoroughly prepare before your meeting.
 - a. Have a written/typed outline of what you plan to say. This will help you keep track of topics and stay organized, ensuring you won't forget to mention any important talking points.
 - b. Even though you may want to follow your outline, don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions throughout the conversation and switch up the ordering of topics if that's where the conversation is naturally going.
 - i. This will keep the meeting more conversational, allowing the administrator to open up and become more comfortable speaking with you. This helps build a relationship and trust.
2. Pro-tip: Start the conversation with a question/comment unrelated to your topics. This will help break the ice and relax your nerves. It will also show the person that you're talking to that you care about and respect them as a person. Consider:
 - a. Asking how their week has been
 - b. Briefly discuss a current news topic possibly related to your ask and their curriculum
 - c. Talk about how your classes have been

Even with all these talking tips and pointers, it is important to understand that every conversation is different and may require its own special guide. Don't be afraid to get creative with how you approach a teacher or lead a conversation. The most important rule is to be calm while you are speaking and be attentive while you are listening. If you're still feeling lost, don't hesitate to reach out to your STF Team Member. Good luck!