



PROFESSOR MANNERS' GUIDE
TO EXCRUCIATINGLY PROPER CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR



Professor Manners, like all instructors in etiquette, has one guiding principle from which all rules follow. As the legendary Aretha Franklin sings it, this principle is “R-E-S-P-E-C-T.” Respect for oneself, one’s peers and one’s instructor is essential if one is to get along in the classroom, as in life. The rules that follow help to elucidate successful classroom interaction.

ONE: No subject is unimportant, especially to the person teaching it. Therefore, the wise student will not say, “I don’t know why I have to study this” or “Are you going to do something exciting today?” View studying difficult or (to you) boring subjects as part of life’s training. Remember, there are no remunerative employment opportunities that do not involve difficulty and boredom at times.

•**NEVER, NEVER, NEVER make this faux pas:** “I missed class/am going to miss class. Did you/Will you cover anything/say anything important?” Yes, the professor did or will. It is your task to find out what you missed and take steps to make it up. Many professors are understandably annoyed if you miss tests or exams without a *bona fide* reason. Every class has an attendance policy. It is your responsibility to know it.

•**Understand also that different fields require different skills,** and that the skills you acquire for scientific work will not be the same ones you need for foreign languages or English or the social sciences. This does not mean (and PLEASE don’t verbalize this feeling to your professor) that one field is “better” or “worse” than another and that your professor should modify his or her teaching style in order to accommodate your skill in another course.



TWO: The successful student is the prepared student.

The first order of business, therefore, is to understand completely the requirements for the course. Read your syllabus carefully. Listen to verbal instructions. Professor Manners wishes you to realize that **your professor is not your mother**. She or he will not remind you to: 1) get up; 2) attend class; 3) do your work. Professor Manners knows many painful stories from personal experience that illustrate the results of not paying attention to the stated requirements for a class.

•**Keep up with your work.** Even if your prof is not your mother, he or she is not an ogre, either. If you are having difficulty, please say so. **But DO NOT under any circumstances** put it like this: “There’s too much (reading, lab work, etc.) in this class.” Professor Manners is forced to point out that this will label you as a whiner and prejudice the professor against you. The proper way to express yourself is to say, “I’m afraid that I’m having some difficulty keeping up with the (reading, lab work, etc.). Can you suggest ways I can improve?” If you feel that you cannot cope with the assignments, exhaust every possibility (courses in study skills, Computer Center, Writing Center, peer and other tutorials) before you quit. When you are required to read something, don’t feel that you know it by just eyeballing the page. Take notes or underline. Don’t



ever assume you know something because you read it in high school or Sunday school. **For every hour in class, plan on spending 2-3 on work outside of class. This is a rough approximation. Some classes take longer.** In the words of the estimable Dr. Darlene Loprete, “You do what it takes to get it done.”

•**NEVER, NEVER, NEVER** say to a professor in one course, “I couldn’t study for the test/finish my paper/complete my lab notebook in your course because I had to (study for a test/finish my paper/complete my lab notebook) in Professor X’s course.” What the professor hears is that his or her course is not important to you, and will treat you accordingly (see **ONE**, above). It is surprising how many students, even in their senior year, regard this as an acceptable excuse. It is not. **You have a copy of the syllabus. Plan accordingly.**

•**Observe your professor’s attendance policy.** Different professors have different policies about attendance. Be sure you know what these policies are and *don’t expect that you are exempt from them*. Attending class also helps your professor to get to know you. Make sure that you make a good and not a bad impression. **N.B.: BEFORE** you or your parents or others purchase airline or other transportation tickets for you, check the syllabus in each class. **NOTHING** makes a professor more upset than to be told that you will or did miss a test because you needed to fly to/from Cancun (or other resort) early (or late), or that you will miss classes because you are finishing off your debut, participating in rush, or pledging. **Professors take a very dim view of such excuses.** Sure, you have a social life. But imagine telling your prospective employer the same thing.



THREE: Observe respect in the classroom.

Respect also means that **you do not talk while your professor or other students are talking**. In a lively discussion, there may be a temptation to jump in. This is okay, but **do not whisper or giggle or plan social things while someone else has the floor**. Such behavior will not incline the professor in your favor and will also annoy your peers. Professor Manners suggests that, if you **MUST** communicate with a classmate, do it in the non-disruptive and time-honored fashion of passing a note. (NOT advisable in some classes.) And observe the “no giggling rule.” (*Unless the professor tells a joke, whether it is funny or not.*)



•Some very simple rules about classroom environment:

Don't put your feet up on the table, desk, or another person's chair.

Don't read J. Crew or other catalogues or books for other classes when in class. **Small classes mean that you are not invisible!** Your professor will not be favorably impressed by this, especially if class participation is part of your grade.

Don't touch, hit, punch, or give massages to other students. (Professor Manners regrets to inform you that she has observed all of these forms of behavior in her classes. She definitely does **not** approve of them.)

Do NOT leave your cell phone on, let alone talk on it in class. If you are so important that you must be in constant contact with others, you are wasting time and money at a liberal arts college.

Do NOT play games, Twitter, text message, or use Facebook on your cell phone or laptop. If Professor Manners suspects you of doing this, she will violate her Prime Directive and embarrass you in front of your

peers. **Abuse of laptops is a prime reason for forbidding them.** Want your classmates to hate you?

Do NOT come in late to a class. (If another professor consistently steps over the bounds of his/her time, explain this to your professor. She or he will take care of it; but be sure that you are truthful about the reason.)

Do NOT leave classes in the middle to go to the bathroom or other sorts of activities. (If you must do so for health reasons, discreetly inform Professor Manners.)

DO NOT come to class inebriated or stoned or in your pajamas. This does not constitute "attendance."

Do NOT wear T-shirts that have offensive or racy slogans or logos. **Do NOT** wear outfits that are more suitable for MTV or prostitution than an academic classroom. You do not have to dress for a job interview, but **THINK BEFORE YOU DRESS.**

Do NOT put your head on the table and go to sleep in class. Most classes begin at a humane hour for persons who have not spent all night partying. It is better **not** to come to class than to risk falling asleep. And **NEVER sit there yawning with your mouth open.** As with chewing, coughing, and sneezing, **COVER YOUR MOUTH.** (Professor Manners must be frank and tell you that she, too, sometimes fell asleep in class. She herself does not mind if this happens accidentally, but others may. And she **DOES MIND** people putting their heads on the table for a snooze or yawning audibly or **snoring.** Others will, too. She will **WAKE YOU.** If there is a policy on class participation, remember that you are not "participating" by exchanging carbon dioxide for oxygen. The only thing that helps is plants.)

•Respect for other students:

•One of the great things about coming to college is to meet different kinds of people. You may very well be prejudiced against certain groups or have stereotypes, even if you don't admit it. Remember that others may be equally unreasonably prejudiced against you. Take time to get to know each other and respect your differences. **THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK.** Honest questions are always better than knee-jerk opinions. •Professor Manners has already mentioned not talking while others are. The most important rule here is **NEVER** to say, "Boy, that's stupid," or the equivalent when someone else expresses an opinion. It may very well be, but others may think YOU stupid, too. Avoid hateful expressions and epithets: words DO hurt. **And YES, there are stupid questions.** See above.



•Respect for your professor:

•Your professor has a personal life, **which is not your business, as yours is not his or her business**, except so far as it affects your academic work and to the extent that you may choose to share it. Your professor should have posted office hours for you to come and see him or her. **DO NOT** expect that your professor will automatically be in the office at other times or should always be available to you. **DO NOT** say, "You're never in your office." What that means is that *at the times you chose to come by*, he or she was not in. Your professor has an office phone, voice mail, E-mail, and a secretary. If all other contacts fail, leave a note. Find out your professor's policy about phone calls at home, and observe it. Same goes for cell phones.

•**DO NOT** assume that there is one and only one way to teach a class and that YOU know what it is. Your professor has spent many thousands of hours and dollars and a lot of passion and sacrifice learning what he or she knows and how to teach it. Don't pit one professor against another. And **DO NOT** assume that the main purpose of classroom interaction is "infotainment". Good professors are often entertaining ones, but that is not their main function. Similarly, entertaining professors sometimes are not the most knowledgeable. Nor is it your main function to be entertained in class. Note the passive voice. Be an active learner.

•How to address your professor:

Most professors will not, on initial acquaintance, wish to be called by their first names. Others will invite you to do so. Unless they do, "Professor" or "Doctor" is the appropriate form of address. (Professor Manners wishes to remind you gently that female professors also have Ph.D.s and also appreciate this form of address. They do NOT appreciate being called "Mrs." or even "Ms." unless they inform you to that effect. When in doubt, it is polite to ask, "What would you like us to call you?")

•**DO NOT** think that your professor "owes" you or "gives" you a certain grade. You earn the grades you deserve. Many students get into trouble when they tell a professor, "I thought I was going to get (usually an 'A') in this class. How come you gave me (anything less)?" Do not compare grades with others in your class, expecting that you should be doing at least as well as your roommate simply because you live together. It is **NOT** recommended to say, "I need at least an A (or other good grade) in this class to bring up my G.P.A." What that says to the professor is that you have not done well in your other classes, and have marked this professor as a "soft touch." Professor Manners respectfully requests that you also refrain from saying, "But this (whatever subject it is) was supposed to be **EASY**." No professor likes to hear that, even if secretly she or he feels it's true. (See **ONE**, above) And unfortunately, in the words of the inimitable Professor Tom Bremer, "Hard work does not always mean good work." **Time spent on an assignment does not always equate to a specific grade.**

•**REMEMBER** that "attitude" becomes only persons who want careers as gansta rappers or in action-adventure films. **If you plan on either, you're wasting time and money here. These are four years like none other in your life. Make them count.**

•Finally, respect for yourself:

•Know your strengths as well as your limitations. Possibly you may have said to yourself, "I'm not good in . . ." That is a recipe for defeat. Say instead, "I don't do as well in X subject as in Y, but I can learn something." Remember that the only really "bad" grade is a failing one, and in most courses that's pretty difficult to achieve. **It's also up to you to learn what your professors teach. DON'T** ask, "What do you want us to know?" This should be fairly clear from the syllabus.

•**Everyone really wants you to succeed.** Your professor would not be in this profession or at this type of college if he or she didn't enjoy working with people like you. All kinds of support systems exist for you. **DON'T** think of yourself as a failure if you avail yourself of them. And if you are having personal or family problems, that affect your functioning well in class, you will need to apprise your professor or advisor or Student Academic Support about them. If a student is consistently late or misses classes and/or scheduled assignments, and the professor does not know something is wrong, he or she will assign a grade accordingly (and mistakenly).

•**Respect yourself by observing limits.** Abuse of alcohol and abuse of drugs is harmful to your body as well as to your performance in every area. Alcohol and controlled drugs also lower your inhibitions against other potentially harmful actions. Remember also that you alone own your body and do not "owe" anyone else its use. You have choices. Make sure that they are intelligent and safe ones. If you think that a professor, staff person or a classmate is using inappropriate language or behavior with you, you do not have to "put up" with it. Report it to your advisor or the appropriate authority. (See Rhodes' policy on sexual harassment and assault.)

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE do not get in a situation of letting work slide so far that you are tempted to plagiarize, copy something off the Internet and hand in work that is not your own. Inevitably, you **will** be detected and you will be turned over to the Honor Council.

•**Keep an open mind.** Critical thinking is at the core of the college experience, and you will encounter many different people and different, often conflicting opinions. You will not learn anything if you refuse to be challenged. People grow in wisdom as well as in age only if they listen. Not everyone thinks the same way about everything. That can be a threat or it can be an opportunity. The college experience gives you a unique opportunity to find out the things that you really DO believe and think. Respect doesn't always mean agreement, but it does not mean dismissing someone else's ideas as "That's just your opinion." Have opinions, but let them be informed, reasonable, well-thought out and defensible ones. Don't be afraid of change. Don't rely on stereotypes. Investigate the truth for yourself.

ABOVE ALL: NO WHINING! REASONABLE DISCOURSE IS THE HALLMARK OF AN EDUCATED, MATURE PERSON. EMPLOY IT.





Rhodes College
—1848—