

Academic Etiquette

or,

**The World's Best Guide to Wit, Charm, and
Sophistication in the Classroom**

or,

**How Not to Annoy Your Professors So They
Won't Silently Curse You in Their Hearts**

or,

Let's Play "Whose Cellphone is Going Off Now?"

A treatise originally taken from *Classroom Etiquette*,
a handout by Ken Tompkins, *et al*, of Stockton College,
as generously shared with instructors on the Chaucernet discussion list,
with minor changes to reflect Carson-Newman policies made by Kip Wheeler

Academic Etiquette: (ak' a dem' ik et' i ket') n. phr. 1. Nearly archaic. Accepted conventions for appropriate conduct in a classroom. Examples of usage: "*Whatever happened to academic etiquette?*" "*You mean, like, wasn't that a New Wave alternative band in the 80s?*" Serious efforts to reintroduce students to this basic concept are underway.

In the last decade, classroom etiquette has been harder to find than bipartisan healthcare reform. It's not a problem confined to Carson-Newman. Students in colleges all across the nation often cannot identify basic breaches of classroom and academic etiquette even when given quizzes about it. Attitudes toward learning and the classroom have been changing. Given these problems, teachers say enough is enough. The time has come to explain some basic expectations in our classes and the reasons for those expectations. Besides, if bell-bottom jeans and tie-dye t-shirts can make comebacks from the days of yesteryear, so can that old concept, "academic etiquette."

Academic etiquette is similar to social etiquette (i.e., politeness), but it goes beyond saying "thank you" and "please," and calling your instructor "Doctor" rather than "Dude." Below, this essay will address specific problems and questions. Reading this will prepare you for situations you may be finding yourself in for the first time, but situations with which teachers have a great deal of experience. Sad to say, much of that experience has been negative in recent years. These techniques and guidelines are designed to make our mutual encounters as pleasant and productive as possible. After all, we teachers and students will be spending a lot of time together in the next few years. It will benefit us both not to waste that time on rancor and ill feeling.

Like Miss Manners, that queen of custom, this guidebook uses question-and-answer format under general topic headings. You can sort through them and locate the sort of questions you are most likely to need answered. Take note, gentle reader. And, yes, there will be a quiz.

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Class Attendance:

Q: Because of some personal problems, I've missed a number of classes early in the semester. Things are better and now I'm back, but when I asked Professor Collins what I missed, she told me that she has a class absence policy and I'm already "over the limit," and thus I can't get any participation points. She says she put this in the course policies, but I don't remember it. And isn't the college's policy that I can miss twelve classes each term on Monday/Wednesday/Fridays or eight classes on Tuesday/Thursdays?

A: Carson-Newman's attendance policy is as follows:

"Attendance at **all** class meetings is required and a student is responsible for all the work, including tests and written assignments of all class meetings. Each individual faculty member will establish the consequences for absence and publish this in the course syllabus. If students must miss class for any reason, they are obligated to account for their absences to their instructors and arrange to obtain assignments for work missed. Students will be allowed to make up class work missed if the absence was caused by documented illness, death of immediate family member, or participation in college-sponsored activities. Otherwise, the instructor has no obligation to allow students to make up work." (*Carson Newman College Catalog*, page 44)

This campus-wide guideline leaves the policy up to individual instructors, so you should ask them individually. Instructors may (and often do) have stringent requirements. For instance, a teacher might choose to give a student no participation points in the class if the student misses so many classes. A teacher might choose to lower an overall grade for excessive absences, or automatically fail a student in the class for exceeding a set number of absences.

Q: I promised not to miss any more classes, but the professor doesn't seem to care. What's it to her anyway? After all, I'm paying for the class whether I'm there or not. Since I'm paying the money, shouldn't attendance be my decision and not hers? If I can do the work, what difference does it make whether I'm there or not?

A: You are an adult, and, yes, the decision to attend class is yours. Teachers know that emergencies crop up. They crop up for teachers as well. Such emergencies sometimes require us to cancel a class--or even two--in a single year. Yet the fact that courses cost money and someone has to pay does not give you the right to perform outside the accepted classroom norms on a regular basis. (Just because you pay for a plane ticket doesn't mean it's your right to ask the stewardesses to open the hatch so you can jump out of a 747 in the middle of a flight, after all.)

Keeping attendance involves time-consuming clerking. It produces exactly what teachers don't want to mess with--excuses and unpleasant penalties. It would be far easier for us simply not to deal with the issue. But when we don't have an attendance policy, class attendance goes down. Clearly you can't learn what the teacher covers if you aren't in class. An attendance policy forces you to come to class, and it forces you to learn more. Therefore, teachers use attendance policies. (That sounds a bit like quantitative reasoning, doesn't it?) A school isn't like a McDonalds restaurant, and teachers aren't like fast food workers. College isn't a place in which you are customers buying food, and you can choose whether or not you want to eat it. While it may make no difference to fast food workers whether or not you eat the provided food (they get paid either way, and don't care about you or your success in life), it makes a real difference to teachers. We aren't paid just to provide an education you can ignore; we are paid to make sure you actually *are* educated, that you actually are mastering classroom materials to enrich you intellectually. If we didn't care about that, we wouldn't go through the hassle of attendance.

Q: *"But I can get notes from other students if I miss class, and I can read the materials on my own time! Why do teachers throw a snit over one missing student at a lecture?"*

A: In an emergency, having someone take notes during your absence is better than nothing. Intelligent students take the time to introduce themselves to one or two students in the class and swap phone numbers, so that if an emergency happens, they have a partner or two to take notes for them or turn in assignments, pick up copies of handouts, and so on. This technique isn't a cure-all, unfortunately. First, you are depending on a friend or acquaintance to take good notes and not miss any important details. That is not always a smart idea. Second, no set of notes, no matter how exhaustive, can duplicate the classroom experience. The best learning takes place in the space between teacher and students. (Otherwise, colleges would simply require students to pay \$20,000 for a library card and not worry about having classes at all.) Third, most of our classes are not just lecture. In-class assignments, visual demonstrations, and small group discussions cannot be duplicated. Fourth, you and the other students are necessary; you make the intellectual juices flow. You raise pertinent points and respond to other students' ideas. If you don't attend class, not only have you missed out on all the ideas other students bring up, but your classmates have missed out too. They have been robbed of your potentially good ideas and questions. That isn't fair to them.

If you are not in class, we assume that you made that choice. (Again, we understand that sometimes you are forced not to come to class because of circumstances beyond your control.) We assume that somewhere in the early part of the morning, you--perhaps a bit sleepy, tired, depressed, stuffed up, or whatever--said to yourself or your roommate: "I am not going to go to class today." We know this because we overhear students saying this sentence to their friends literally every day in the hallways and parking lots. (One colleague of mine claimed he heard the phrase three times in the space of walking from the third floor of Henderson Hall to the Warren Art Building.)

If you are a student making that choice, you should accept the repercussions. Do not offer a lie, a distorted fact, or any other fabrication thinking that it will (1) lessen the standard penalties or (2) lessen our disappointment.

As far as we are concerned, almost no excuse is valid (except actual medical emergencies) for missing a class. You can make appointments at some other time, you can meet with friends or family at other times, you can shop at some other time, you can register at some other time. All of this goes back to the implicit contract between us. We promise to be in class; so do you. You should keep Woody Allen's quotation in mind: "Ninety percent of success in life is just showing up."

Punctuality

Q: *I'm just about fed up. I live in Knoxville, and I have to commute for a half-hour drive to get on campus. By the time I arrive, there are no parking spots by the building, and I have to park off campus, and that always makes me late for class. Lately, Professor Lee has been giving me displeased looks when I walk in. Why is he blaming me for being late? It's not my fault it's such a long drive to campus.*

A. Yes, commutes are bedeviling, aren't they? Professor Lee used to live in Norris, so he has had over an hour commute. Driving can be a sincere pain. We imagine though, that your professor is giving you displeased looks because he's wondering the same thing we're wondering: if you know the commute is long and that parking is difficult, why not leave earlier? If you are late once (maybe twice?) over the course of a term, sometimes that can't be helped. The polite way to handle this *faux pas* is to slip in as quietly and quickly as possible, taking the seat nearest to the door, and apologize after class is over. Such politeness, however, loses its impact if it happens several times over the course of the semester. Then, the apology takes on a different cast; it looks smarmy and insincere. Being late regularly signals to the

professor that you don't treat the class as seriously as whatever it is that you were doing that made you late. It suggests that whatever you were doing is worth regularly interrupting her class. You don't want to create that impression. Leave twenty minutes earlier and you will arrive on time, and your teachers will smile upon you.

Q. But wait! I'm not just watching Jerry Springer re-runs; I'm coming in from work. I can't just leave twenty minutes earlier! I'll lose my job. Surely that's different!

A. In response, we would ask you a question: if you knew you couldn't get to class on time, why did you sign up for it? "I thought I could," you say, "it's the parking/traffic jam/road block I didn't figure on." Then our question changes: just how late are you? Depending on your answer, you might have options. If you are regularly missing the first ten or fifteen minutes of class, that's too much. You need to drop the course and take it another term when you have more time available. If it's less than that, say five minutes or so, talk to the professor, explain your dilemma, and see if she will allow you a little leeway. If she agrees, then make sure that you arrive as quietly and unobtrusively as possible. Remove your coat and have your class materials out *before* you enter the classroom. Students who don't do so are so busy getting their materials set up they can't perceive how all the students around them are frowning and distracted by all that rustling and shuffling.

Make arrangements with other students in the class to leave a chair near the door vacant. That means you won't have to pick your way across the room, or walk up to the front of the class and block other student's view of the board as they take notes. Your goal is to be as unobtrusive as possible. Don't sit down and start pouring *latté mochas* for yourself, or sharpening your pencils, or sorting through stacks of books in your backpack. Have everything ready to go in advance. That is an example of good manners. And if the professor is gracious enough to allow you to be late regularly, think twice before requesting any other favors. Remember, she doesn't have to (and may not) agree to this one. Think of this way: how would your boss look at (and deal with) a situation in which you were regularly late to work by ten or twenty minutes every week?

Similar logic applies, by the way, to leaving the class while it is in session. We understand that sometimes nature calls at awkward times--that sometimes you must leave class and obey your bladder. Sometimes, even illness might overtake you. However, we think of these as unusual occurrences. Cigarette "emergencies" do not count. Once or twice a semester, you might be brought up short and have to leave. Fair enough. We understand. And we appreciate your efforts not to disrupt class when you go. We notice how you leave, and how careful you are to shut the door gently and avoid blocking other students' view of the blackboard or overheads. We notice every time you leave. We notice how long you're gone. We notice if you're carrying food. (Yes, we will note if students leave "to go to the bathroom" and return with sandwiches from the Eagles' Nest SnackBar.) And we're not the only ones who notice. Other students actually complain to us in private and/or make disparaging remarks about those "slackers" who regularly skip out and distract them.

Furthermore, if you're leaving during class every week, whether we say anything or not, we are not happy about it. In fact, most of us probably don't say anything to you because to do so would disrupt the class even more. But ask yourself, how many times has your professor excused herself in the middle of class? Our longest classes are two-and-three-quarter hours long. Some teachers may provide a break in the middle of those long classes, but not all of us do. Unless you have a medical condition that requires precisely timed medication, we suggest that part of a responsible student's class preparation is taking care of physical needs before class begins (especially on examination days). Then, get as comfortable as you can in that little desk and tough it out. We might not actually thank you for it. We might not even notice this invisible sacrifice your bladder has made for the classroom's tranquility. We can, however, assure you that you won't be subject to disapproving stares and sniggering student comments.

Q: *One professor told his class never to bring cell phones to class--even if they are turned off. Why are cell phones forbidden? Why can't I just set them to "vibrate" rather than "ring" and take the phone call quietly in the back of the room?*

A: Some people have never heard that carrying cell phones into classes (or churches, or theaters) is a breach of good manners. Cell phones ringing in class is another *faux pas*. Perhaps you feel you need an exception to this rule. (Say, your child is at home with a fever; you told the babysitter to call if it goes above 101°.) If so, tell us. Ask if it would be acceptable to leave the phone on. Beyond such emergencies, few good reasons require bringing a cell-phone to class. Calls from your last hot date, your stockbroker, agent, or bookie don't count as emergencies. Even "vibrate" can be distracting when that student on the third row suddenly leaps up in response to the unseen buzz. And that silent "vibrate" mode isn't so silent when the cell phone is resting against materials in a backpack or against the side of a metal furniture bar. Finally, human beings make mistakes. You might intend to set it to vibrate, or you might even intend to turn it off before you enter the classroom. In spite of those intentions, students sometimes forget. Then the phone rings. Then class is disrupted. Then etiquette is broken. It's far better not to bring the devices at all. If you normally carry a cell phone for roadside emergencies, lock it in the dashboard of your car at the beginning of the school day. That way, you will still have it for the emergency, but you won't violate rules of etiquette.

A Rose By Any Other Name:

Q: *I saw Susan O'Dell Underwood in the elevator, and she was dressed really well. I told her, "Hey Susan! Aren't you 'Miss Thang' all dressed up!" She turned up her nose and said, "That's Dr. Thang' to you, young lady." She was joking a bit, but I think she was also a little bit offended. What's up with that, Doc? I'm just trying to be friendly.*

A: In the infamous words of Dr. Evil in the *Austin Powers* movies, "That's *Doctor* Evil. I didn't go to Evil School for eight years to be called *Mister* Evil." After spending four years in undergraduate school, two years earning a M.A., and five to eight more years earning a Ph.D., many instructors treasure those academic titles. For whatever reason, many female instructors have a particularly hard time getting students to use the right titles in reference to them. One of the small perks of academic occupations is the right to use and insist upon respectful use of our academic designation, so we do.

In a democratic society, differences in rank are easy to overlook--especially for students fresh out of high school who are in the habit of referring to all their instructors as "Mrs. so-and-so," or "Coach so-and-so." That doesn't prepare students for distinguishing between "Dr. so-and-so" and "Professor so-and-so." Taking the time to learn the distinctions in academic rank, and using the right title is not only respectful, it suggests a degree of intelligence on any particular student's part since she is familiar with such conventions. (Additionally, many of you are ROTC students, so you especially should master the etiquette of titles as future preparation for habits you will need in your military career.)

The academic world has a variety of ranks beyond the B.A., the M.F.A., the M.A., and the Ph.D. Your teacher may hold the rank of instructor, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, professor, or professor *emeritus* in addition to the general title of "doctor." The correct title is "doctor" if your teacher has a Ph.D., or "professor" if your teacher has any academic rank above the level of "instructor." Teachers who hold an MFA degree or who have the rank of lecturer or instructor are politely referred to as "Mr." or "Mrs." or "Ms." as they indicate in class, though it is permissible to refer to them generically by the courtesy title of "professor," especially if you are uncertain about a teacher's rank. It's better to compliment a person by using the more formal term than it is to insult someone accidentally. The same

holds true for nicknames like "doc" or "prof." It is ill mannered to assume a level of familiarity that might make another uncomfortable, and it leads to a chummy attitude that is off-putting for some instructors.

Some teachers like the informality of being on a first-name basis with their students. That informality, however, is not the default setting for your discourse. Assume you should use the formal title until the instructor specifically requests that you use his or her first name.

Class Preparation

Q: I'm not the smartest literature student who ever lived, but I always work hard and I always try to be prepared for class. Sometimes I'm up in the middle of the night getting the reading done. Last week, when I was getting some coffee before my morning Shakespeare class, another student told me I looked like a zombie. When I told her I had been up until 3:00 a.m. working, she laughed at me. She told me she only reads the books she knows we're going to write papers on and forgets about the rest. She always comes to class and takes careful notes, but she just doesn't talk in class when she hasn't done the reading. She figures the professor will go over the books she hasn't read, and she's able to save herself time and stress this way. I have to admit, she makes sense. Why shouldn't I follow her lead? What does it matter if I've fallen behind or skip a reading or two?

A: We'll be taking the moral high ground here, thank you very much. For us, one of the most difficult aspects of teaching is when students clearly have not prepared for the class. First, it has a profound impact on our courses. Haven't you sat through classes where every remark or question the professor makes is greeted with stony silence? Does it make you uncomfortable? Does it make the class boring? For you? For all the other students? Now put yourself in the teacher's shoes, and imagine asking questions to which no one responds. If you asked a teacher a question and wanted an answer, wouldn't you find it rude if she just ignored you? If the teacher merely looked embarrassed and said, "I didn't do the reading for today, so I can't answer that"?

As teachers, we know that not all classes will be perfect ones. We know that some days we are "on" and doing a great job with the lecture, and some days we are "off" and the class is stumbling. (Heck, we've sat in some classes ourselves where we thought the professor was lucky she didn't have to face anything *worse* than silence.) We don't always blame bad classes on students. Even when we do realize that lack of preparation on your part has sunk a particular class, we're experienced enough to put a class's reactions in perspective. But if you assume that teachers don't care, you misjudge our commitment to your education and to the material we teach. We want you to learn, and failure to read assignments does not help learning.

So when your friend argues that we will explain the important bits of the texts anyway if she doesn't have time to read them, we have to wonder if she understands what we *all* (both teachers and students) are trying to do in a class. We wonder if she considers what effect her decision will have on the class in terms of discussion and ideas.

First of all, reading literature is sort of like "wrestling" with a text. This phrase means that extracting knowledge and understanding from a story or poem is hard work. It calls for flat-out effort. Many of you have told us reading this material and interpreting it doesn't come easily for you. In spite of our experience, neither does it come easily for us. We struggle just as you do. Think of the number of times you've seen us working out some interpretive angle we haven't prepared for--some idea a student raises that we didn't even imagine before entering the class. These moments, while exciting, often mean a lot of spontaneous brainwork--which we have to articulate on the spot without preparation. We stumble. We misspeak. We start over. We don't always come up with the perfect comment or *bon mot*. Some of our ideas may lead to dead ends. Some of our observations and interpretations remain half-formed or

unresolved when class ends. We don't always quite arrive where wanted. We don't always say what needs to be said. Given our mutual struggles as well as the average time in a single class or semester, we are lucky to succeed at our interpretive wrestling at all. The more students have read this material and thought about it, the more brains we have working on the problem. The more brains we have working on the problem, the more likely it is that one of us (and not necessarily the teacher) will come up with that *bon mot*, that witty insight, that clever interpretation that dazzles the entire room. The more you are prepared, the more the class as a whole (and not just you) will enjoy and engage the material. The more you enjoy the material, the more you learn. The more you learn, the more value you will get for your tuition. It becomes more likely the class will *matter* to you, rather than turn into fifty minutes of stammering and silence.

Working with texts is not easy. We have little time, and even with the time we have, we might not get all the work done. That is why we require and insist that you prepare for class. It is also why those of you who don't prepare never get the point, never make the literature yours by putting your own original twist on it, and never really understand the magic. At best, you might understand it in a distant, general, and theoretical sense because we teachers have described our struggle, our wrestling, our interpretation of the literature. But that isn't *your* struggle; it is ours alone. If it isn't yours, you won't get the point. You won't experience the power of poetry, or think deeply about the issues raised in a story. Letting us tell you about the text is like having someone else learn a foreign language for you. It's the easy way to go about it, but it can't compare with learning it yourself and speaking face-to-face without an interpreter.

Whether you are really in class to learn or not, we have to proceed on the assumption that you are there to learn--and you can't learn from the readings if you aren't actually reading.

Meeting with the Professor (Part I)

Q: I'm having some trouble in English Seminar, and Professor Hall told me she would meet with me to give me some help. But every time I go to her office, she's not there. I'm in class during all ten of her posted office hours. Surely she's in her office more often than that. I'm not sure what to do.

A: Have you told her you can't make her office hours? Have you tried to set up a time that's agreeable to both of you? You're right; most of us do more work than our office hours indicate, but often our work involves research in the library, photocopying materials, having discussions with colleagues, attending meetings, and so on. We post office hours so you will be guaranteed a time to find us when we aren't wandering elsewhere on campus on various errands.

We might have to cancel office hours if we are called to a conference with the department head, a faculty convocation, or for other legitimate reasons (we usually post a notice on the door to indicate what's keeping us elsewhere, where we are so you can find us, or when we will return). If you come by during office hours, and we aren't in, leave a message saying that you were there and that you will return at a certain time, or that you will phone us, or e-mail us, or see us in class. None of us makes a habit of skipping our office hours. Even if we weren't motivated by the hope that an actual student will come in to chat, we would be motivated by our department chair's rebuke if we abandoned our office regularly!

That point being noted, remember that the college has two types of teaching schedules: Monday/Wednesday/Friday and Tuesday/Thursday. Teachers with long commutes are often only assigned to teach on one or the other. We may be off campus on those days when we don't teach. It is a bit unfair to blame us for not being in our offices on days when we don't teach or have posted office hours. It would be like us blaming you for not being at school when you are on vacation. If you really can't find us outside of class, corner us in class and pin us down for a meeting time. You know we'll be there.

Meeting with a Professor (Part II)

Q: I was absent on Thursday, and I missed getting a writing assignment in Professor Millsaps's Southern Female Writers class. I like to get to work on these assignments immediately, so I called her office Friday afternoon to find out what the assignment was. I got her voicemail and left a message asking her to call me back and read the assignment to me over the phone or meet me later in the day to get me a hardcopy. She didn't. How am I supposed to know what to do if she won't tell me?

A: Gentle reader, we will tell you right now that Professor Millsaps will not call you and dictate the entire assignment to you over the phone, no more than she will arrange to drive by your apartment and personally drop off a copy to you. Nor, if you had called me with such a request, would I call you back as a matter of principle. Why not?

You are calling to ask for a favor. *She* did not fail to show up in class and fail to pass out the paper to the class. *You* failed to show up and get it. She doesn't need anything from you. You need something from her. Intelligent students understand that power dynamic; the situation indicates it is your responsibility to go out of your way and get in touch with her. She should not have to go out of her way to track you down just so she can do you a favor. This applies not simply to missed assignments, of course, or simply to Professor Millsaps. All of us receive notes and voicemails asking us to call students who wish to get into a closed class, from students who need a deadline extended and want us to call them and arrange it, from students who need some information that only we can provide, but who think they should not have to show up on campus and find our offices or go out of their way in the least to get it. We simply do not understand this logic. It's pretty darn nervy.

As a contrast, suppose you ask your friend Joey in Knoxville to loan you some money. Would you subsequently ask that same friend to drive down to Carson-Newman to hand deliver it to you at eight o'clock at night because you don't want to go to trouble of driving up there? Would you ask him to handle all the arrangements to get the money to you and track you down on *his* own time? By all the bright stars in heaven, no! If you had the nerve to ask the friend for money, you would probably go out of your way to drive up there yourself, ask him in person, and make it as convenient as possible for that kind soul. He's the one doing *you* the favor, so you should make it easy for *him*, not the other way around. The same general principle applies to students when they ask teachers for a favor. That's good manners. Track down Dr. Millsaps at her office during her office hours. Don't expect her to track you down, much less take a half hour to dictate an assignment to you over the phone.

We do understand, though, that sometimes your schedule and ours don't mesh well. Sometimes, in spite of your best efforts to contact us, you can't reach us. It happens. I know one professor has a rule. If a student has made a good faith effort to reach her--which she even defines as three phone calls or a combination of phone and e-mail messages--she will indeed call back. Some of us even like to get this business out of the way and will call back without such prompting. But here's the rule of etiquette. When you call, state what it is that you need and indicate that *you* will try again to reach the professor, but *if* (please note the emphasis on *if*) the professor would like to contact you herself, she can reach you at the following phone number. That's covering all the bases and being polite at the same time.

E-mail should theoretically make some of these issues moot. Just don't be so rude as to demand an immediate response. Likewise, intelligent students trade their own names and e-mail addresses/phone numbers with one or two other students in each class, and arrange to copy handouts or assignments from the other students' materials in a pinch. If you do that, you will only need to rely on the teacher for clarification. (And again, observe the rules stated above.)

The Workload

Q: I'm a first semester junior with all my Gen Ed requirements done. This semester, I'm taking Professor O'Hare's Senior Seminar and two other 400-level courses, Lee's Shakespeare class and Wheeler's Chaucer course, and one Mammalian Physiology 316 class in the Biology Department--and I'm dying. I can't believe how much material there is to cover in those three lit classes! I can't believe how tough the theory readings are in English Seminar, or how long it takes to read stuff in Middle English and early Elizabethan English. I constantly have papers or projects due, so I'm always in the library. If I'm not there, I'm at home reading. If I'm not reading, I'm writing. Between those classes and my fulltime job at Ruby Tuesday's, I barely have time to sleep or eat. Don't you professors realize that your class is not the only class we're taking? How can you all require so much work and expect us to do it well?

A: You are taking a heavy load. We can see that. We would have tried to make you choose between Chaucer and Shakespeare because we know how much work is involved. We always advise students to limit the number of 400-level courses they take in a single term. A general rule of thumb is that **two** should be the limit for a junior--particularly if you are taking advanced courses outside the English Department. If you've been given special permission to take an upper-level course before you complete its prerequisites (which are designed to help with those advanced courses), you should limit yourself to a **single** (as in *uno, one, solus, une, singular*) 400-level course. We know very few students we think can handle the work that goes into the schedule you describe. We can only imagine that you insisted on this schedule--which, of course, is your decision. But none of us would knowingly or willingly sign off on this without warning you about the work involved. So, we agree. You probably do have too much work to do.

We do, however, hear frequent complaints about the work our courses demand--even from those students who take what we consider manageable loads. Complaining about the workload is nothing new. We did it when we were students--though we rarely (or never) mentioned it aloud to our professors. Do we discuss the amount of work we ask you to do with other teachers and supervisors? Yes. Do we adjust the amount of work that we ask you to do as a result of these discussions? Sometimes. Are we flexible in setting due dates? Usually. Actually, if you must know, according to education studies of colleges across America, during the past four decades we have reduced the amount of work you do.

We know that you are busy. How could you not be? We know that most of you are juggling college and a job. In the days of yesteryear, the faculty here also had part-time jobs while they went to school. (Yes, we know that some of you work full-time; we are concerned about that fact.) Despite our common experience, we feel that standard priorities have reversed themselves. Many students today no longer live on campus, nor do they work on campus, so they don't center their lives on being here. Instead, many must drive an hour to get here and, as soon as classes are over, they drive back to where a job is. Students then must work (hard) at that job until the next morning when they drive down again.

What we are getting at here is that we know students (usually) are not lazy slackers. We know that many of you have heavy responsibilities in the outside world; we believe that you usually make every effort to meet our assignments and deadlines. Yet we hear a constant litany of lamentation concerning the workload. That complaint results from two incompatible goals: you want to get out of here with a respectable degree *as soon as you can* so you can work at a high-paying job. We want you to graduate with a respectable degree *as soon as you have finished the work*. You focus on yourself as a future worker. We focus on you as a current student.

We will continue to push you to work hard because that is the nature of our job. To be honest, I admit it is also our delight. Teachers like setting the bar high and see students grow and rise to the challenge. That is not going to change. When faced with unchanging circumstances, wise students put up with hardship by smiling and getting on with the work, which isn't going away.

Academic Advising

Q: I had an advising appointment with Professor White and I just totally forgot about it. When I saw her in class the next day, I asked her if she would meet me after class, but she said she couldn't; she had a departmental meeting. I'm supposed to register tomorrow morning and I don't know what to do. I don't know what to take, and I'm afraid the stuff I need will fill up and be closed if I don't get in now.

A: O glorious day! You managed to address two of our most basic complaints about the etiquette of academic advising in one fell swoop! These are (1) students who do not show up for appointments and (2) students who are not prepared for advising sessions.

The first point would be self-explanatory. We are annoyed when students make appointments and then don't show up. It is good manners to call and let us know that you are not going to make it. That prevents us from sitting around for a half-hour waiting for you. It also opens a scheduling slot where we can fit in other students if we know you can't make the meeting. If you are unable to cancel in advance, at least have the good grace to send us a brief personal or written apology and pretend to be sheepish about the offense. (The key word is an *apology*--not an excuse justifying the cancellation.) We do care if you keep appointments. Don't you?

The second complaint is more serious. While we are happy to say that most of you come in with well-planned schedules, knowing exactly what you need to take to graduate, and simply wish to double-check it with us and get our signatures, we are still surprised at the number of you who are completely unprepared for meeting with an advisor. Too many students, in our opinion, are unaware of the college requirements. We are always a bit startled by this because you (or your parents, or some scholarship committee) spent considerable funding for this education. Would you, for example, spend \$20,000 on a car without bothering to check out the various deals, the available factory options, and safety features of that car? Would you in good conscience make such a purchase without making sure it was suitable for your needs? I suspect that some of students weigh their options far more carefully when spending \$50 on CDs, groceries, or clothes than they do on "buying" or selecting courses over a semester.

The college requires a good deal of clerking, i.e., filling out forms and paperwork. Advising students has more than its share of this onerous burden. It is the student's responsibility to make sure that the forms are completed, to verify that transfer courses meet college requirements, to check off those Gen Ed requirements, to choose a language to gain competence in, and to see that all grades are listed correctly in the college records. In other words, you must do a large chunk of academic planning on your own. We are here to answer questions, to give advice, to offer alternatives, to smooth the way, to open doors, to negotiate with the administration, or to let you vent when events run awry. But advisors are *not* your clerks, your servants, or your guarantee that you will graduate. It would be foolish to behave as if we were.

Q: I'm trying to finish up my English degree and my education degree requirements at the same time. I want to graduate this December rather than in May. I just discovered that my student teaching requirements conflict with taking Senior Seminar. When I e-mailed my advisor for help--to arrange a way around taking Senior Seminar--she didn't seem too eager to make this happen. I don't think this is fair. Why didn't she warn me that this might happen?

A: First, let us say that student teaching assignments for Education majors are almost always listed as "TBA." It depends upon the available teaching spots in the area. Because such elements are beyond our control, advisors might not feel comfortable giving you advice about it. We don't want to misdirect you, so we might send you to the Education department to get their advice about fulfilling their requirements.

We simply tell you what it's going to take to fulfill an English degree. If you have met regularly with your English advisor, you should know what those requirements are. If you've met with the folks in Education, you presumably know what their requirements are. Knowing both sets of requirements, you yourself should have been aware of the potential conflict. The fact that you have not been able to avoid the conflict does not in any way release you from fulfilling those requirements. Academic advisors do not exist to help you get out of requirements; they exist to explain them--and to help ensure you have fulfilled them. Notice the word *help* here. Ultimately, you must shoulder this responsibility.

If you have not met with your advisor and this all comes as a surprise to you for that reason, well, what can we say?

We might also add that a December graduation strikes us as a little precipitous anyway. We do know that fulfilling a double major may necessarily add a year to the normal matriculation cycle. It looks to us like you want the advisor to help you get out of school earlier with one less requirement fulfilled than all the other students. Without a very compelling reason, we're unlikely to do that.

Academic Honesty

Q: I was taking a mid-term last week--I had studied hard for it--and as I took a break from writing an essay, I noticed a guy in front of me getting answers from his next-door neighbor. Cheating, I thought, is a bad thing to do. But then I got to thinking. We're taught to question authority, aren't we? Okay, Dr. Authority Figure, explain what's wrong with taking a quick peek during a test when you have a temporary brain cramp? And while you're on the subject, tell me why faculty members have such tantrums about plagiarism?

A: Cheating and plagiarism equal stealing. You absolutely need to understand that. What's wrong with stealing in an academic setting? To begin, let us suggest that there is a kind of implicit contract in a teacher/student relationship. The instructor's side of the contract reads: "When you enroll in this course, I promise to teach you the following things: [the teacher inserts a list of facts, ideas, or skills appropriate to that particular class here]." The student's side of the contract reads: "When I enroll in this course, I promise to complete all of the required work, to read all the assigned materials, to attend all the classes, to participate in class [and so on]." Both sides assume that what information you get in the course will either be the teacher's own or will be identified as coming from someone else, and the student's work will be the student's own or it will be identified as someone else's.

Cheating on a test or plagiarizing in an essay breaks this agreement. The teacher has agreed to look at *your* work, to evaluate *your* ideas, not recycled garbage from www.schoolsucks.com. In the same way, Doctor Wood cannot bring in a random janitor to class and have him give the lectures. That would be neglecting his responsibility in the contract. He's agreed to be the one teaching you. In the same way, you've agreed to do the assignments.

Certain questions and comments arise time and again when we discuss plagiarism:

- "I understand I have to quote something an author said, but do I have to insert citation for an idea?"
- "I found this on the Internet. Do I have to quote it?"
- "I read a lot of books for this paper. I can't remember exactly where I found this idea."
- "Wheeler makes us quote everything and add a Works Cited page but Drewitz-Crockett isn't as concerned about a Works Cited page if the homework is written in response to a single essay without secondary sources."

Here's the quick response: keep track of your sources and give proper citation for direct quotations, putting those direct quotations in quotation marks or indented block format if the quotation is four or more lines long. If you quote somebody who is quoting somebody else, add a note explaining that the material is an indirect quotation. If you borrow somebody else's ideas, summarize somebody else's argument, or paraphrase an idea by stating it differently than the author did, you don't need quotation marks or block quotations, but you do have to include a citation in parentheses clearly showing where the material came from, and you do need a Works Cited page. At all times, the reader should be able to see what ideas are yours and what ideas are someone else's. For the long answer, read the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition, or review *Writing at Carson-Newman*. You know you have done an adequate job of citing something if a stranger could pick up your paper, read the citation and the Works Cited page, and go the library or website and immediately find the exact quotation or citation, flipping to the exact book or journal and the exact page number. If a stranger couldn't do that, you are missing information you need to provide.

By the way, plagiarism is based on a strange (and incorrect) assumption about teachers. It assumes that teachers don't read the books and articles available in the library, that we don't have notes on them or remember them, that we never go online and examine those websites offering "free" papers to students, that we don't know how to use Google to search for phrases that appear in stolen papers, and that we can't distinguish between a scholar's writing style and a student's writing style. It also assumes that we don't remember your previous papers to compare with the one we're grading now. Those are mighty dangerous assumptions, pilgrim.

The saddest aspect of all this is that plagiarism is a trap. Even assuming students get away with it (and many no doubt do), those students will spend hours finding and constructing a plagiarized paper rather than taking the same time to write it themselves. Some are so desperate that they spend money buying an Internet paper rather than working with us to write their own. Each time they do that, they miss an opportunity to work on their own writing and improve. This is the real danger. Desperate students know their writing skills are imperfect, and they fear getting a C or D or F on their papers, so, they try plagiarizing. If they get away with it once, they are encouraged to try it again. After two or three years of plagiarized papers, the lack of writing causes whatever grammatical skills they initially had to fade away. Their ability to use verbal logic diminishes. Their skills at eloquence and rhetoric gradually evaporate. Meanwhile, other honest F or D or C students are doing their own writing, and they are getting better at it. They might not be experts getting A grades, but each paper they write helps them improve a little bit more. After two or three years of writing and working, they finally grow competent in their own abilities, even if they fail one or two classes initially. The honest student blossoms all the brighter. The plagiarist wilts all the worse. It's a crippling cycle for the plagiarist both psychologically and academically.

Skillful writing can be a painful process, as we know. It's time-consuming, as we know. But it's a worthwhile process and one that you will not master through stealing or other shortcuts. Work hard on your essays, and do not fail to cite properly any information taken from any source other than your own head.

Plagiarism is destructive to student potential. It is violation of trust between student and teacher. It forces teachers to fail and/or prosecute students who violate academic ethics. That, gentle reader, is why faculty members have such tantrums about the cheating. We don't want to see you throw your potential away.

Deadlines

Q: I'm a little ticked off! I work hard to make the money I spend on my courses. (Yes, mom and dad kick in a chunk of change too, but it's my major, my classes, and it's gonna be my diploma.) As you know, on top of work stress, school is pretty darn stressful too. Sometimes with my busy schedule, and with the

necessary sanity time to live a little on the weekends, it can be hard to finish assignments the exact nanosecond my teachers want them done. I do my assignments, don't get me wrong, but sometimes I need a little extra time--just a day or so. Why do the teachers act like it's some favor when they accept late assignments? Why do some not accept them at all, even if it sends my grade in the toilet?

A: Aha! So you are trying to have a life outside of school! That's your problem right there.

Kidding aside, we understand that sometimes it's hard to get things in when they're due despite your diligence. Again, we know life can be unpredictable. Cars break down. Hard drives crash. Children grow ill. Bosses demand overtime. We know these things happen. Believe us, we hear a fairly constant litany of excuses good and bad each week. What can we say? Deadlines are a fact of life; all of us have them. What *do* we say? That depends upon the teacher's policies and when and how you present your particular deadline dilemma. But before we get to that, a little about what the deadlines mean to us.

The faculty insists on deadlines because papers and tests "mark off" the term's work. Our responsibility is to see that students have achieved a certain level of knowledge and experience in the course. Papers and tests reveal that level. Students also can use papers and tests to see how much they've learned and whether they need to increase their efforts or alter their strategies.

Most of us set deadlines for the class but can be convinced--when the facts warrant it--to extend the deadline for individuals. (We often need "extensions" ourselves when it comes to grading that work. We get behind, too.) The problems arise when students take advantage of such generosity. An extension of a deadline is not--contrary to popular student mythology--*normal* or an inherent God-given right. Because a particular teacher is merciful once and gives you an extension does not mean that another teacher must, or even that the same teacher who gave you an extension before will do so again in a later class. If you take an extension for granted or assume it is coming, teachers feel used and taken advantage of. We feel that we gave you a kindness, and now you've come to expect such things like Christmas presents. The proper way to get an extension is to ask us in advance--say two or three days--for extra time to complete the work. Asking for an extension on the day an assignment is due or the day before is blatantly admitting that you haven't worked on it (or even thought about it) much before. That does not make us supportive.

Doubtlessly, the worst and rudest way is to slip a paper under our doors an hour (or a week) late, or to show up a few class periods after the paper is due and then ask to turn it in. That is a dead giveaway that you don't have a legitimate reason for an extension or that you feel it's your "right" to turn it in late. Such behavior also does not make us feel supportive.

We want to be fair about all of this, but we also must be fair to the students who do get their work in on time. That's our number one concern. Our number two concern is personal. In the case of our own work, if students don't turn in papers on time, it makes it hard for us to schedule our own grading load, and it could theoretically make us late for submitting progress reports and/or mid-term grades to our own supervisors. That gets us into trouble. Why should we look kindly on your request if fulfilling it is going to make our lives more difficult? Keep these points in mind and ask politely for extensions the next time you have a good reason for one. We will try to be understanding, but don't assume all teachers will give you one automatically (or even at all).

Lies, Deceptions, and Depravity

Q: I am so furious! I was waiting for Irish Literature to start when I heard another student, who is also in Professor Barker's English 301 class with me, bragging about the fact that Barker had "bought" some bogus story about why he hadn't turned in the last paper. Dr. Barker was handing them back and he went up to collect his, claiming he had turned it in when it was due. She said she'd look for it, but he needed to

print out another copy. He was really proud at his cleverness. It just burns me up that he got away with this. I'm half tempted to rat him out.

A: Alas, the impermissible Big Lie. We're not surprised you're angry. Such moral depravity also infuriates us. Why, the sheer number of illnesses, dead relatives, and court appearances we hear about every week would convince us we were all living in some corner of Dante's *Purgatory* if we didn't believe at least some of these excuses were fabricated. (One particularly uncreative student at another college told me she had to attend her paternal grandmother's funeral . . . three different times . . . on three different dates.) If you lack moral fiber and engage in deception, you had better make sure your teachers don't find out, given that such deceit is listed under point "Q" of the College Code of Conduct as prohibited behavior requiring disciplinary action.

In this case, the deception you recount is particularly galling because it puts the professor at fault. Not only that, it might cause the professor to actually spend an hour or so of her time looking for the nonexistent paper--time that might she might have spent helping another student or preparing for class. The perpetrator has stolen a small chunk of the teacher's life and prevented her from devoting that time to other students--all merely to cover up his own vice. That is why it's impermissible.

That being said, we'd actually urge against ratting this guy out. Interestingly, this type of lie is the one most often found out, for several reasons. First, the offender, when showing up to collect his missing paper, does not seem overly bothered by the fact it's missing. He accepts the news that we don't seem to have it with nary a frown or a look of panic. He also either misses the next class or attends and does not show up with the paper, offering some story about not being able to find the disk or his computer's hard drive crashing. Normally, students who have already finished the work look horrified and surprised by the news we don't have the paper, and they rush immediately back to their dorms, print out a new copy, and make sure it's in our hands in fifteen minutes. People who have finished the work feel a sense of urgency in such a situation. Why? Because they really did the work and they feel they deserve a grade for it, just like everyone else who turned the paper in on time. Most of the folks who tell this lie are simply too casual and slow about getting the work in. The principle is simple: lying is easy; writing is hard. The liar has bought some time, but not much time. In fact, that paper often isn't turned in until days after telling the initial lie. This is pretty much a sure giveaway.

Particularly foolish students--like the one you describe--brag about their misdeeds. Just as Saint Augustine describes in the *Confessions*, some villains take pride in their vice and boast as if were a virtue. Trust us, word does get around from other students as well even if you don't want to be the one to rat him out. The teacher might not handle the problem publicly and overtly, but the guilty party will suffer the consequences eventually. One Shakespeare teacher I knew at West Texas A & M University would never accuse a student of lying to his face--even if she had firm evidence. Instead, she made a special point of, as she put it, "grading the hell out that student's papers and tests," i.e., taking extra time to mark off points for *i*'s that weren't dotted and *t*'s that weren't crossed, and often ensuring he would fail the class if the rest of his work wasn't near-perfect. Unfair? Possibly. Indirect and sneaky? Certainly. But so is lying.

If you know a student who thinks this deception is a good "late paper" strategy, tell him to murder his granduncle and arrange to attend the funeral before resorting to such a trick. Or better yet, urge him not to lie at all. Tell him to make arrangements before the crisis comes. In the long run, that's undoubtedly the best course of action--for you, for him, for his granduncle, and for us.

The Sacred Syllabus

Q: *I'm so confused. Professor Lee handed out a syllabus at the beginning of the semester, but in the past couple of weeks, he keeps changing it. He took off one short story and added another. He changed a*

couple of due dates, too. He is giving us warning a week in advance, and I haven't actually started any of the readings that got changed, but it still makes me nervous. Why do professors hand out syllabi if they're not going to follow them?

A: Actually, while some singular masculine Latin words ending in *-us* switch to an *-i* in the plural, the word *syllabus* is from the Greek *sittybos*. If we wanted to get nitpicky, the plural should be *syllabuses* rather than *syllabi* even though that variant now appears in most dictionaries . . . but enough about that. The problem is a misunderstanding of what a syllabus is. Many individuals argue that it has divine or legal status. The word, however, only means "a brief tentative outline about the main points to be covered," as *Webster's Dictionary* puts it. The word doesn't mean "legal contract of things to do at specific times." No one doubts that a syllabus is a helpful document, but the faculty members know they are simply a tentative guideline, and there may be inevitable changes as the course progresses.

Students often want to treat them as binding documents and use them against teachers when it suits their purposes. If we don't mention *x* in the syllabus, they argue that we cannot add *x* in the middle of the term. (For some reason, they don't complain about those times teachers choose to remove an assignment or reading. Go figure it.) The students will then go to administrators, claiming that this is "unfair." The insistence that every requirement and in-class exercise be listed at the beginning of a course would produce some strange results. What a syllabus is, then, is an inflexible flexible guideline of absolutely-must-be-covered tentative assignments. Think about this, gentle reader. Occasionally, a class needs extra time to master a concept before moving on, so the teacher needs to juggle assignments to provide that time. Perhaps a spring snowfall might cancel a day's classes. In other situations, a class might master something with unusual speed, and the teacher then needs to move on to new material rather than letting the class sit and stare at each other for a day or two. We might clearly need to change a syllabus in the middle of a term when our plans don't work, but, on the other hand, students want to list every possible contingency before the term starts. See the problem?

Keep in mind that a syllabus is a general class outline, not a set of commandments carved in stone by the finger of God. Teachers do, can, and should change them if necessary.

Breaking Bread

Q: I have three classes in a row on MWF. I'm not hungry when I walk into my 9:55, but by the time I get out of my third class at 1:50, I get so hungry I can't concentrate. Between classes, I often grab a quick hotdog and chips and bring them to class. Someone told me though this is rude. What's the policy on such matters?

A: Traditionally, eating in the classroom has been frowned upon. The idea is that, if a speaker is going to all the trouble to prepare a lecture or a lesson, the polite thing for the audience to do is give her its full attention. (This is also why it's rude to get up and throw stuff away or sharpen your pencil in the middle of a class rather than at the end or at the beginning.) Likewise, many professors feel that any sort of eating distracts from your purpose--doing serious discussion of literary texts or writing. Thus, if you need a good breakfast, eat it before you get to class. Sometimes, classes will pack up and go on field trips to the library, and food becomes a real nuisance then. Other classes might meet in the computer lab, and then every drop of soda pop and every crumb of bread potentially could damage the school's computers. The English Department has not yet had a student destroy one of our \$1,500 dollar computers by spilling food on it (to my knowledge). If you are the first to demolish one of our machines in this way, it will be a source of great shame.

On the other hand, not all professors are bothered by food in a traditional classroom. They know that busy days mean missing meals, that low blood sugar can play havoc with your mental capacity, and that hunger

might actually distract you while you're trying to learn. These rare professors who don't mind snacks, however, usually draw the line at full meals, snacks wrapped up in crinkling plastic, food that requires distracting preparation, and anything that's overly noisy. Slurping on a straw is downright distracting, and many students don't seem to realize how the rest of their classmates are giving them dirty looks when they can't hear the lecture because of the noise. The best course of action is to ask your teachers what their preferences are.

Personally, I prefer a no-food rule with one exception. When students enroll in an 8:00 a.m. class or a night-class with me, I provide them with a special dispensation to drink caffeinated beverages in class, as long as they are discrete about it. Not all teachers, of course, agree with such a policy.

We do all agree, however, that civilized people clean up after themselves. We've all walked into classrooms littered with empty cups, soda pop cans, and food wrappers. Such items are relics of barbarism rather than academic virtue.

End of the Term

Q: I didn't say too much in Professor O'Hare's Postmodern Poetry class. I didn't do too well on the early papers either, but I think I really figured out a good argument for my final essay and my Powerpoint project, and I worked really hard on them. I was dying to know what my grade was, so I left Professor O'Hare a voicemail, but he didn't respond. I know he'll see a big difference between this work and my earlier efforts. I would think he would appreciate my desire to do well and take the time to send me an e-mail message, wouldn't you?

A: Frankly, no. It always comes as a surprise when students who have never said much in class demand their papers, returned and their rewrites graded as the last hours of the term pass by. One of my colleagues at another school was plagued by a student's request for her final grade point average the evening of the same day she took her final. Students should be (and usually are) concerned about their grades, but asking the question won't make them be graded any faster. If the grades are done, students will get them the same time the rest of the class does. If they aren't done, asking won't magically make them done.

Speaking for myself only, I don't mind students being curious about their grades early in the course. I even don't mind (too much) when students send in dozens of inquiries during the final week while I'm struggling to finish up the grading. I'm an exception, however. In general, it's considered rude to ask about final grades unless you think there is some sort of error involved. (Teachers are human, and we do make errors.) If you have to ask, ask about them after they have been submitted to the college. This is usually five to seven days after the last day of final examinations. It is most considerate to set up an appointment and ask in person. (It shows you're taking time out of your schedule to make the request, even as the professor is taking time out of his schedule to answer it.) It is somewhat less polite (but still acceptable) to ask via email, which gives the professor time to flip through his records and double-check the math. Demanding grades by phone or via voicemail, in which you expect the teacher to drop all the other students' work and grade yours, and calculate your average on the spot, is simply darned inconsiderate.

The other problem we experience at the semester's end is a flood of past work--incompletes, rewrites, make-up examinations, and so on--all which has to be graded in the last few days or hours. We are partly to blame for bringing the problem on ourselves if we don't set earlier deadlines and force you to do the work earlier. Do keep in mind that landslide of work we are managing at the end of the term and get your work in on time. At the very least, remember it is boorish to demand a rewrite assigned a month ago and which you only turned in yesterday now be graded and returned so you can calculate your GPA. Surely you have better and more enjoyable things to do with your time. After all, the semester's over. Your GPA

isn't going anywhere. Relax. The quality of the work you've finished will determine your grade, so a responsible student like you--one who has already brought in a couple of rough drafts and worked with the teacher to fix problems in advance--should have nothing to worry about.

Incompletes

Q: I'm beginning to empathize with Job, Oedipus, and Homer Simpson. This semester has been one disaster after another. My car broke down the first week of the semester and I missed several classes because I couldn't get to school. Next, my boss changed my work schedule so I no longer had quality time for my homework. Then, near the end of the semester, I had fights with my girlfriend and I couldn't put in my best effort, and I missed the last week of class. Trouble is, when I went to a professor and explained this, and asked for an incomplete for the course, she said no! I tried to explain that over the summer, when things settle down, I will surely do much better work. But she was adamant. What's up?

It is not surprising that the professor is unyielding. "Incompletes" are to be assigned, according to Carson-Newman's policy, when "the student has failed to complete the course in the allowed time due to illness or some justifiable delay." That doesn't sound like the case here. Your situation is unfortunate, but it doesn't fit the requirements. If a student has missed a substantial part of a course, he or she should officially withdraw following the required college procedures. If it is too late to withdraw, the student should expect a disappointing grade. Incompletes are designed to give breathing room to students in exceptional circumstances--such as they need heart surgery, or they are eight months pregnant and the doctor orders bed rest, or they have documentation showing they just contracted mononucleosis and leprosy simultaneously. Those are good reasons for an incomplete. Incompletes are not granted simply because a student could not put forth his or her best effort.

Class Presence:

Q: A friend and I were strolling around the Student Activities Center the other day when she spotted Professor Wood. My friend's an English major too, and she needed to ask him a question about eco-criticism. As they talked, she remembered to introduce me to him. "Ho, ho," said Professor Wood, "So I finally meet a student who likes to read Horton Foote." How did he know that obscure tidbit about my artistic tastes? I never took any classes with him. Up until that meeting, I wasn't sure if I knew what he looked like--I'd confused him with Professor O'Hare.

A: How did Professor Wood know about your secret indulgence in Foote? Probably one of the other faculty told him (although it could have been another student). When you spend two to four years in and out of our classes, we get to know you. Carson-Newman is too small for us not to. Over time, you each develop a "class presence," a kind of public or class reputation. This reputation can be positive or negative. For example, suppose there is a student who tends to fall asleep in English 301 in Professor Millsaps's class. Professor Millsaps might ask Professor Collins if that same student fell asleep in her 201 course. Let's suppose the answer is "yes." That student is at risk of being nicknamed "Rip Van Wrinkle," "Morpheus," or "the sleeper." Someone else's class identity might be that he tries to leave class a little early each day by prematurely packing up his books, or that she always raises her hand to answer questions first, or that he's the one who never mastered MLA format.

A class presence can be negative or positive (neutral as well, although in this context, neutral is probably closer to negative). Good students develop positive class identities by contributing ideas in class discussion or writing well or having perfect attendance records (or all three ways).

"Argh!" you cry, "don't hold my shyness or lack of experience against me! I don't respond to in-class discussions because I don't want to look foolish in front of everybody else." All we can answer is that part

of the "wrestling" with literature we talked about earlier involves taking chances, trying on new ideas for size, trusting that they are being tested by like-minded people. Being intellectually and socially alive means taking intellectual and social risks.

For the past several semesters, upper level English classes have typically had between five and ten students. Basic courses typically have twice that number. You know how small the faculty is. That small, close-knit community is one of the most attractive elements of Carson-Newman. Any English majors who have been on campus for more than a year know most of the faculty by reputation, even if they haven't had a class with them. In the same way, understand that the faculty members "know" you too. That means your reputation is important. Keep this in mind and build a good one.

Probably the trait that creates the biggest negative impression is behavior that interferes with other students' ability to learn. Whispering with a classmate--even quietly in the back of the class--prevents other students from hearing a lecture and taking notes. Wearing a large hat prevents people who sit behind you from being able to see the board and copy down information. (The custom that polite people take off hats when indoors originates in this visual blockage, and in the fact that rude students use their hats as a "shield" to hide themselves from participation and eye-contact.) Some students even get up in the midst of a lecture and walk in front of the teacher or the blackboard, thoughtlessly blocking the view for other students. They crumple up paper noisily and throw it away, or slurp noisily on a drink, preventing other students from hearing. One wonders how they are so oblivious to their peers squirming and frowning behind them. To paraphrase Jeff Foxworthy, "Didn't your mama teach you better'n that?"

Remember how a neutral presence usually equates with a negative presence? Students who don't participate in class discussion may appear apathetic or unintelligent--even if they are immensely enjoying the course and are actually quite bright. Take the time to speak up occasionally and participate to show us your excitement and insight. If you make an effort occasionally to draw eye contact and smile, so will your teacher. Don't hide behind baseball caps and sunglasses or stick an iPod in your ears. Don't skulk on the back row of the classroom when there are twenty empty desks closer to the front of the room. If the class takes a trip to the computer lab, refrain from checking any e-mail or web browsing until class ends. Not only do such actions create the impression you don't wish to join the intellectual community, it is disrespectful to a lecturer. Likewise, don't rush out when class is done as if you can't stand to sit another nanosecond in the course, and refrain from packing up all your books and notes five minutes before class is due to end. It doesn't create a good impression. All these rules hold doubly (or even triply) true for guest lecturers or presentations in the library, where we expect you to be on your best behavior as a courtesy to the speakers.

How you listen is also part of what creates a polite classroom presence. When the teacher is addressing the class, refrain from clipping your fingernails, or getting up and walking around, or looking out the window longingly, or reading coursework for another class. Refrain even from "resting your eyes" and listening with eyes closed, or laying your head down on your desk. Leave your iPod unplugged from your ears and your sunglasses off of your eyes. Such activities not only distract other students who want to listen, they establish--correctly or incorrectly--an impression in the teacher's mind about how committed you are to the class.

Finally . . .

Remember that nothing in this document should be viewed as an attack on any specific person or an expression of unhappiness with you, our noble pupils. *Au contraire*, we are proud of your creativity, your achievements, your hard work, and the plethora of ways you have found to express yourselves. You are a special group, and we will always be grateful for the opportunity to instruct you.

The changes in academic culture are not of your doing. In many ways, the students at Carson-Newman are far more formally polite than those we have taught at public universities. I, for example, have never been "sirred" so much at any other institution by so many sincere students. It just seems that some of the other subtle nuances of etiquette have gone lacking.

However, we would be disrespectful to ourselves and to you, gentle reader, if we remained silent. Whenever the possibilities for learning decrease in our classrooms, teachers are obligated to speak out. Those possibilities are being lessened by the concerns addressed in this document. We suspect you will appreciate being told about our expectations of you; we know that if we were in your positions, we would too.¹

¹ This etiquette guide is based on a handout, *Classroom Etiquette*, 2nd edition for 2001, written by Tom Kinsella, Debby Gussman, Lisa Honaker, and Ken Tompkins. Professor Kinsella offered it online for teachers on the CHAUCERNET e-mail discussion list to adapt to their own classrooms. My thanks go to Professor Kinsella for his generosity with the material. The spirit and humor of this treatise originate with these earlier authors; minor changes and Carson-Newman examples come from me. --KW