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Peggy Schenk
Iowa State College

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Teachers Reveal Pets and Peeves

By Peggy Schenk

Do teachers have pets? We can't answer that query, but we do know that they, like you and you and you, have pet peeves.

Recently we turned "quizzer" on a representative group of college instructors. They were glad to unload some of those little things that students unconsciously do to make a class or "lab" not so pleasant. A teacher's heart may be won like that of any human being—by consideration and thoughtfulness.

A pet peeve, like a nut shell in a bite of cookey, can cause real exasperation to the instructor. The peculiar thing about this whole thing is that these pet peeves are not absent-minded idiocies, but are discourteous annoyances to fellow students as well as to the instructor.

The student fault most frequently mentioned by the faculty was inattention. Picture the classroom during a lecture. One student has his eyes closed, while in contrast another taps the desk with nervous fingers. Another is writing a letter, which Mother would rather not receive if she knew that its writing distracted more people than just its author. This person, thinking of last night's date, gazes out the window and pauses in her reverie to powder her nose. Here comes Miss Always Late, noisy heels clacking. She either slams the door, or she leaves the door open for the instructor to close.

Do you particularly enjoy a class in which one person ignores good social graces by passively chewing gum? Some instructors would prefer yawning to gum chewing; others number yawning in the top gripe bracket. Muffle it or swallow it, we say, as you would in any other social situation.

This girl is talking in a whispered undertone to her neighbor, perhaps laughing. Other students are disturbed; the lecturer wonders what the joke is, wonders if the students are laughing at him. In the corner sits the pencil-twiddler, marking elaborate geometric patterns while the professor talks. Here and there are the spinal cord sitters, whose slouchy posture indicates lack of interest.

Not all the offenders are silent. Silence is not always golden and speech is not always silver. Miss Argu Mentative wants to contest every point made—not realizing that her adolescent attitude indicates the desire to attract attention. Another "juvenile" adult keeps a frantically waving hand in the air in spite of another student's reciting. Miss Gush wants to put in her two-cents' worth of irrelevant examples or foolish questions—a sure sign of apple polishing.

Apple polishing, we admit, has made us self-conscious. We stifle genuine interest in a course. We lean over backwards to avoid that accusation "apple-polisher." In doing so, we forget that teachers are human beings who are not so blind that they confuse sincerity with insincerity.

The class period is still in session. Five minutes must elapse before the hour ends but a disinterested few distract the rest of the class by gathering up books and putting on wraps. At last the class is over. The professor sighs and gathers up the jumbled papers handed in by the hastily exiting students.

By thy papers shall they know thee. A paper handed in represents you. Is it tidy, clean, legible—or does its messiness give away a lazy and indifferent personality? Statistics show that a type-written paper or notebook receives a proportionally higher grade than handwritten work.

At the beginning of each term, instructors take the trouble to explain the form for the papers that are to be handed in. But the wise student carefully follows these instructions from that time forth. Small size paper is a bother to the instructor and is easily lost in recording grades. Some instructors insist on the larger regulation size sheet, 8½ x 11—all prefer it.

A conference hour is like any date. If it must be "broken," the instructor likes to know ahead of time, as he welcomes free time as much as the student. Coming to see the professor without an appointment may be as inconvenient to him as an unexpected guest for dinner.

An instructor likes to talk to us and help us, but not just before a class when he is organizing his material and thoughts or when the students thunder into the room. No one likes to be surrounded with a bevy of questions as he enters the classroom. The query, "How am I getting along?" is as foolish as saying "How am I feeling?" The student knows the real answer better than the instructor.

It is the best policy to let the instructor know if something unavoidable occurs which makes it impossible for you to attend class. Some instructors, however, prefer results, not excuses, and feel justified in expecting assignments on time regardless of whether you can bring them to class yourself or not. It facilitates recording of grades to have all papers at once; otherwise a late paper must be handled separately as a special favor. If you are absent or late, it is a good idea to ask someone in the class about the assignment rather than to ask the instructor to repeat it for your sole benefit.

"Please," said one laboratory instructor, "if I might only be spared from nosiness in the lab when I conduct recitation, from students' drowsy requests to repeat questions or instructions and from notebooks handed in late."

The classroom attitudes are important. One reason is that every student is rated on a personality chart for every laboratory course he takes in most progressive schools. These reports form a permanent record. They are referred to when a student is being considered for a position or for an honorary appointment in a college organization. The chart rates an individual "much above average, above average, average, or below average" on appearance, reliability, dependability, tact, qualities of leadership, judgment, initiative, industry, attitude towards work, cooperativeness, promise of growth and scholarship.