

**C**ollege instructors deal with excuses everyday. Students skip class, fail to submit assignments on time and fail to show up for scheduled exams. Students challenge their grades on assignments, papers and essay tests.

Learn how to establish clear course expectations and clear consequences for students who fail to meet your course expectations then challenge your decisions concerning these matters. Learn how to deal with demanding students, put an end to the excuse-making and take pleasure in the classroom experience.

## About the Author



Gloria Howell is a professional speaker and writer with over 25 years combined experience in the counseling field and in higher education as a psychology instructor and college administrator. With a passion for teaching and coaching, and the skills to motivate, she has the expertise to help people change and improve their lives.

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# No More Excuses:

## 79 Tips for Managing College Students



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## GLO-HOW-TO

publication

By Gloria Howell



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- 76) Always refer back to the syllabus / back to the policy as it is written
- ◆ As soon as you make one exception, you'll be back into encouraging the excuse-making or it will backfire in some other way
- 77) Sit back and enjoy not having to get into excuses and enjoy teaching like you never have before
- 78) Wake up in the morning looking forward to going to work
- 79) Be grateful that you have one of the best jobs in the world

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## Introduction

**S**tudents today bring to class with them life experiences and responsibilities not common to the traditional students of the past. They have unusually more worldliness and more savoir-faire.

These same students fail to meet course expectations set by the instructor, yet they make blatant attempts to influence the instructor to be excused from having to fulfill the requirements.

The result is instructors who bend the rules and make exceptions after listening to excuse after excuse. These same instructors end up feeling regretful, resentful and burnt out and stressed out.

In this one extraordinary little tip booklet, you can learn everything you need to know to help you manage your class in a stress-free manner and the result will be **no more excuses**.

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## Get ready for 79 tips for stress-free classroom management!

- 1) Use the web for your course materials
  - ◆ This is the age when everyone is internet savvy
- 2) Post your course information online prior to the beginning of the semester.
  - ◆ Students lead busy lives and function best when they can plan ahead
- 3) Create a detailed syllabus and post it on your course webpage
- 4) Copy and paste your school's attendance policies into your syllabus.
  - ◆ These policies are usually designed to be general, yet provide credibility
  - ◆ They are meant to provide a foundation from which instructors can expand and specify their own requirements
- 5) Take roll and keep an attendance record
  - ◆ Your records may be reviewed for financial aid or other reasons
- 6) Determine your students' course grades with exams, papers and projects, not attendance and participation
  - ◆ An instructor who solicits excuses for absences will be rewarded with excuses

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- 67) Talk formally and informally with your students about your beliefs and philosophy of education
  - 68) Share stories about your educational experiences
    - ◆ Everybody loves good stories
  - 69) Be a mentor
    - ◆ Sharing your experiences with those exceptional students can be most rewarding
  - 70) When a student is unable to meet minimal course requirements, encourage her to withdraw and say, "Maybe next semester will be a better semester for you to take this class."
  - 71) Allow your students to opt for an "Incomplete" only when they have met at least 75% of all course requirements and are unable to get their final assignment to you in time for you to post grades
  - 72) When assigning an "I", clearly specify a deadline in writing and what the consequence will be for not meeting that deadline (usually failure)
  - 73) Keep grade and attendance records and any other assignments for at least 3 years
  - 74) Be strong when a student asks you to make an exception about late assignments or missed tests
  - 75) Make no exceptions to any of the guidelines that you set at the beginning of your course

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- 56) Start class with a reminder of where your students should be with assignments, projects, test preparation, etc
  - 57) Start class by giving an overview of what you will cover in the class
  - 58) End class with a review of what was covered and what is due for the next class meeting
  - 59) Make learning all of your students' names important
    - ◆ We tend to remember what is important
  - 60) Make up a class phone / email list and make copies for everyone in the class
  - 61) Encourage your students to be a support system for each other
  - 62) Help your students learn each others' names and get to know each other
  - 63) Encourage your students to contact each other instead of contacting you every time they have a question about class
  - 64) When a student misses class, immediately refer him to the phone list
  - 65) Encourage your students to work cooperatively together on projects and assignments when appropriate
  - 66) Help your students understand you

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- 7) Encourage class participation but don't make it part of the course grade
    - ◆ Consider how this is detrimental to the student who is quiet and shy
    - ◆ It is also difficult to grade participation in an objective manner
  - 8) Create test questions unique to what you cover in class
    - ◆ If your students miss class, it is their loss
  - 9) Create an active and attention-grabbing learning environment
    - ◆ Absences will be minimal if you make it worth your students' while to attend
  - 10) If you **must** count attendance, establish a point system that subtracts points for absences and tardiness
    - ◆ Your students need to know how their grade is affected when they miss or run late
    - ◆ This must be created with painstaking detail in every respect
  - 11) Designate a specific due date for assignments
  - 12) Allow your students to post assignments online
    - ◆ This provides documentation of exactly when the assignment was posted
    - ◆ It also saves paper

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- 13) Make online assignments due at 11:59 pm on a specified day
    - ◆ Students are productive late at night
    - ◆ You don't have to be there to collect assignments but you'll have a record of exactly when they were submitted
  - 14) Take off a pre-determined number of points for each day that an assignment is late
    - ◆ I use 2 points per day which is not very much but can add up
  - 15) Help your students learn responsibility and make good choices
    - ◆ i.e. It may be worth losing 2 points and taking an extra day to put some quality finishing touches on an assignment
  - 16) Give extra credit points for each day that an assignment is turned in early – but set limits
    - ◆ I give 2 points per day for a total of 10 points
  - 17) Start grading assignments immediately instead of waiting for all to be turned in
    - ◆ This makes your job easier by spreading out the workload
  - 18) Cover up the student's name when grading assignments
    - ◆ This is not always possible, but you will be more objective when you don't know whose assignment you are grading

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- 46) Learn about all the resources that are available for your students
    - ◆ This includes resources within the system, as well as in your subject area
  - 47) Teach your students about those resources and encourage them to use them
  - 48) Remind yourself what you love about your subject area
    - ◆ Sometimes we get caught up in everything else and forget about our passion for our own subject
  - 49) Be enthusiastic and share your passion
    - ◆ This will energize your students to learn more on their own
  - 50) Know what you believe / what your philosophy is about education
    - ◆ Clarifying what you believe can help improve how you teach
  - 51) Improve your ability to communicate and teach by getting to know your students and what their interests are
  - 52) Be a good role model and come to class prepared
  - 53) If you must miss class, notify your students ahead of time if at all possible
  - 54) Get to class early and talk to your students informally
  - 55) Start class on time

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- 36) Allow extra credit assignments to be submitted **only** if you also offer the same opportunity to all students in the class.
    - ◆ Again, discrimination can be an issue
  - 37) Help your students succeed
    - ◆ Students want to do well
    - ◆ Good instructors want their students to do well
  - 38) Provide guidelines for long complex reading assignments
  - 39) List specific areas where your students should focus their reading to help them avoid getting overwhelmed
  - 40) Create assignments that are meaningful and have a true learning objective
    - ◆ Again, application of knowledge is the true test of learning
  - 41) Help your students understand the meaning and/or purpose of the assignments
  - 42) Avoid giving certain assignments because it has always been done that way
  - 43) Appreciate your students and their intelligence and creativity, no matter how different from your own
  - 44) Appreciate your students' youth and energy
  - 45) Compliment your students' responsible behavior and creativity

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- 19) Create shorter and more frequent assignments
    - ◆ This makes your job easier when it comes to grading
    - ◆ It also provides more feedback for your students and allows the opportunity for them to adjust their investment in the course
  - 20) Have at least 2 assignments due and graded in the first quarter of the semester
    - ◆ If a student is not doing well, he has time to decide whether to step it up or withdraw from the class
  - 21) When creating an assignment, decide with excruciating detail what it is that you want
    - ◆ You cannot objectively evaluate how your student did when you don't know what you expected him to do
  - 22) Simplify your grading techniques by developing check-lists, rating sheets, evaluation forms, grading keys, rubrics, etc
    - ◆ Grading a big project or long paper can be done quickly when you just check off the required components
  - 23) Determine a point value for each section of the assignment
    - ◆ This also speeds up the grading process
  - 24) Give open-book / open-note exams
    - ◆ You will need to develop test questions that require your students to apply what they have learned
    - ◆ Critical thinking is the true testing of learning

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- 25) Grade and return tests and assignments within a week
    - ◆ Your students deserve to get feedback in a timely manner
  - 26) If you give objective tests, grade them onsite for immediate feedback
    - ◆ Your students can see what they missed, ask questions, then be ready to move on to the next unit
  - 27) Give your students your grading check-list, evaluation form or rating sheet at the beginning of the semester
    - ◆ They will know right from the beginning what is expected of them
    - ◆ They can easily see when they get their graded paper back from you where they went wrong
  - 28) On your grading form, specify the number of points you will deduct for something your student included that should have been omitted
    - ◆ i.e. If a student includes a results section in a research proposal, she obviously misunderstood the assignment and should be penalized accordingly
  - 29) Specify the number of points you will deduct for errors with grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc
    - ◆ Every instructor is an English teacher and students should be penalized in a manner that is appropriate to the course level for such errors

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- 30) Write clear essay questions that ask for specific information
    - ◆ If you want the answer to include 5 major attributes, say so
    - ◆ This way, you have a simple guideline for taking off points if your student did not do what you expected
  - 31) Make your essay questions easy to grade
    - ◆ If you are looking for 5 major attributes, assign a 25 point value to the answer then take off 5 points for each attribute your student did not include
  - 32) Tell your students the value of each essay question
    - ◆ If it is worth 25 points, your students deserve to know this
  - 33) Establish clear consequences and procedures for making up missed tests
  - 34) Schedule make up exams to be taken during the final exam period
    - ◆ This sets limits and resolves the issue of when and where to meet your student for the make up
  - 35) Create a make up test that is shorter and more difficult than the original test
    - ◆ Otherwise, the good students complain that it is unfair
    - ◆ Besides, making accommodations for students who do **not** have documented disabilities can be interpreted as discrimination against all others