

Note to faculty readers:

This document is intended to be distributed in the first week or two of class, but not on the first day of class (where we'll discuss the content in much less detail). I am considering posting it on Moodle in chunks, with questions scattered throughout, so that students need to interact a bit while reading it.

My first goal in writing this document is to be as transparent as possible about what I actually do in practice regarding absence and lateness and their effects on grades so that a) I am not making exceptions for those who know to ask for exceptions and b) I acknowledge from the start that health and personal issues are a part of life, not rare exceptions (and avoid the hidden message that having such issues is irresponsible). I also hope that this document will help students learn how to handle situations of absence and lateness as responsible adults (keeping in mind that for many of my students, it's only been months since they needed a parent to contact the principal's office if they were going to miss class).

I wrote this document with Math 140/141 in mind. This is a yearlong honors course that meets three times per week, with primarily first year students. It would need modification (perhaps substantial) to work for other courses/instructors.

I appreciate feedback. Some of the areas that I'm still struggling with are whether/how to address students who aren't interested in or are ambivalent about succeeding in the class and whether/how to be more explicit about trauma/mental health issues.

Feel free to use anything here that is helpful to you.

Draft: Absence, Lateness, and Grades (Math 140/141) Debra Borkovitz Summer 2013

We have discussed how important attendance and keeping up with homework are to your success in this class. In the best case scenario, you will be here every class and do all your homework on time; however, sometimes we don't get the best case scenario, and you may need to be absent, to miss part of a class, or to turn in work late.

Below I discuss examples of good and bad reasons to miss class, with some thoughts on more ambiguous situations, followed by information about communication around missing class and making up work. Next is information about being late, leaving early, and stepping out. I then discuss the principles I use in assigning grades and how absence and lateness affect (or do not affect) your grades.

Note that this handout is premised on the assumption that you want to succeed in this class.

Good Reasons to Miss Class:

Health Related:

- You are sick and contagious. Don't put others at risk so you can have perfect attendance.
- You are too sick or in too much pain to contribute to the class or to get much out of it.
- You are sick or injured and you think that coming to class will likely interfere with your healing and prolong your illness/injury.
- You have an important medical appointment or procedure that cannot be scheduled any time but during class.

Note that it can be hard to tell exactly how coming to class will affect your health. Sometimes you have to make your best guess and then adjust if needed (e.g. leave class early because you don't feel well, etc.).

Other:

- A funeral, wedding, graduation, or other very important life event for someone very close to you.
- A court date, citizenship ceremony, or jury duty.
- Going with a friend or family member to the ER or otherwise being present in an emergency.
- An important holiday that falls during class time.
- You have a sick child, and there's no one else to care for him/her.
- The weather is bad and your commute is such that it would be dangerous for you to travel to Wheelock.

Bad Reasons to Miss Class:

- You didn't do the homework and want more time to do it (due dates do not change when you miss class; see below for information on extensions).
- You overslept.
- You stayed up all night doing homework and are too tired (get some help from student support to work on managing your time better; or you might need to drop a class if your homework and work load is making it impossible for you to get enough sleep).
- You're finding the material hard and class frustrating (missing class will only make the situation worse).
- Advising appointment, make up test for another class (don't make appointments during class time).
- Registration slot during class time (you can register during class).

- The instructor is going to be absent (occasionally class will meet without me when I can't be here; these classes are just as important as the others; of course, if I cancel class, that's a good reason to be absent ☺).
- There is a holiday that other people in the class observe (e.g. Good Friday, Yom Kippur), which you don't observe, but you pretend to observe so you can take the day off (your integrity is worth more than a day off).

More Ambiguous Situations:

- Sports game for a team you're on
- A friend visiting from far away that you can only see during class time.
- Family vacation.
- Rally, vigil, or other social justice or community event.
- Service learning trip.
- Field trip from another class.
- Celebration after a major sports team wins
- Guest speaker at the college
- Last minute child care for a friend or family member.

One principle to keep in mind is that education is your primary or one of your primary jobs right now. If you're thinking of missing class for something that isn't an educational activity, think about whether you'd miss a job for the same reason (perhaps your future teaching job, not your current job). If you're thinking about missing class for another educational activity, think about how important the activity is to your education and how special an opportunity it is. Also think about how your absence affects your classmates (we learn in community and miss you when you're not here). Consider how often you've missed class.

Communication around Missing Class:

- If you know in advance that you're going to miss class, let me know (if you tell me a long time in advance, please remind me again a few days before).
- If you missed class without telling me in advance, send me an email as soon as you can to let me know you're OK (or have another student in the class give me the message).
- If you have something are going to miss more than a week of classes, please contact Paul Hastings in Student Success phastings@wheelock.edu. He can help you think about how to best manage a long-term absence
- If you are not comfortable telling me the reason for your absence, you don't have to go into detail. You can use phrases like, "I wasn't feeling well," "I had a family emergency," or "I had to attend to something important." I won't interrogate you. Of course, if you are comfortable, you can tell me a bit more.
- You do not have to bring me a note from a doctor if you are out sick. I don't look at them.

- Do not ask my permission to miss class. If you ask, my response will be, “You’re in college; it’s your decision.” I do not grant permission to miss class. You decide to miss class, and you take responsibility for that decision. However, I am available to help you think through whether it’s a good idea to miss class in a particular situation.

Making up Work after Missing Class

- It is your responsibility to find out the work that you missed in class and the homework, and to be prepared for class when you come back. Check Moodle; I post all handouts and homework assignments there.
- If possible, meet with a classmate to find out more about what you missed.
- If you miss several classes, it might not be realistic to come back to class prepared and caught up, especially if you’re still not feeling well. Nonetheless, familiarize yourself with the work you missed; don’t just walk in and ask me what you have to do.
- If you miss several classes, you might want to meet with a math leader or peer tutor to help you get caught up. You can also make an appointment with me.
- Do not email me to ask what you missed, unless you have already checked Moodle and the information was not there.
- Deadlines do not change because you miss class. See below for information on negotiating extensions.

Missing Part of Class -- Being Late, Leaving Early, Stepping Out, or Attending to Something External During Class:

The same general principles for missing a whole class apply to missing part of a class: it’s your decision, it’s your responsibility to make up what you miss, and please let me know in advance if you know in advance. Here are a few more specific details:

- Ideally you wouldn’t be late, leave early, or need to step out, but sometimes there are good reasons for one or more of these to occur, and it’s better to attend part of the class than to miss class entirely.
- Enter or leave as non-disruptively as you can. If you’re late, enter quietly. If you need to leave, if possible, wait for a moment when we’re between things or doing a small group activity. Pay attention to whether the door is closed or open when you enter/leave, and leave it the same way (close doors quietly).
- You’re in college; you don’t have to ask permission to go to the bathroom.
- As with absences, I don’t grant permission to be late, leave early, or step out. You decide to do so, and you do it responsibly and take responsibility for what you missed.
- In general, phones should only be used for purposes relevant to class: looking up something on the internet when appropriate, using the calculator or a math app when appropriate, taking photos when appropriate, etc. However, in some

situations (e.g. weather is bad and your ride needs to change plans, relative is having surgery) it might be hard for you to be present in class without outside contact, so receiving messages can be a good decision. In these cases, if you need to attend to a call, minimize disrupting your classmates and me: if we're in a whole class discussion, step out into the hall to call or to text. If you're in a small group activity, a quick text is OK, but step out in the hall to talk or compose a longer text. Of course, put your phone in a quiet mode.

- Texting while we're in a whole group discussion/activity is distracting to me and interferes with my teaching, and thus disrupts not only your learning, but also your classmates' learning (and texting under the tables is even more distracting). Texting when you're in a small group or individual activity is sometimes distracting to me and is often counter-productive to the group getting its work done, but in a quick emergency situation, it can be OK.

Interlude: My Principles for Grading:

Before moving on to how to negotiate late papers and how they affect your grade, here is an explanation of what I value in determining grades.

1. **Quality of Work.** This is the basis for all my grading.
2. **Equity.** As much as possible, I grade all work according to the same standards for quality.
3. **Transparency.** As much as I can, I explain to you what I mean by quality work, why you got the grade you did, and how you can improve your work for a better grade.
4. **Learning from Mistakes/Improvement:** With the exception (for logistical reasons) of work that is due near the end of the semester, all major papers can be revised without penalty, and there are ways to learn from mistakes on tests and improve your grade.

Deadlines and Extensions:

- This is a fast-paced honors class, and deadlines for assignments keep us on pace to explore all the course material. Ideally you would always turn in excellent work on time, but in reality, sometimes excellence and punctuality are in conflict. In this class, I generally prefer that you err on the side of excellence.
- If you want an extension on a paper, ask me before the due date. Let me know why (the explanation doesn't have to be too detailed, if you have privacy concerns) and give me the specifics of what you want. An example, "I wasn't feeling well over the weekend, and I am not satisfied with the quality of my paper. Can I turn it in on Wednesday instead of Monday so I can do a better job?"
- I generally grant all reasonable requests for extension. Requests are reasonable when they don't make a lot of extra work for me, when they don't violate my

principles for grading, and when the length of the time requested is appropriate for the situation.

- It usually takes me about two weeks to grade a set of major papers, so if one paper is a few days late, it's not a big inconvenience to me. However, the work in class keeps rolling in, so it is not good for you to be working on an old assignment when there are also new ones.
- If you see someone else turning in a paper late, assume that s/he has a good reason that you don't know about. Your first reaction might be that it's not fair that s/he had more time to do the paper than you did, but if at some point you need more time, you can ask for it. Also, you can revise your paper if you don't like your grade.
- Note that very late papers tend to go to the bottom of my pile, and it might take a long time for me to return them. Sometimes I am not able to give them the careful feedback that I give on other papers – feedback, which can help you improve future work.
- “Regular” homework is designed to prepare you for class. I collect it randomly and return it the next class. It's only a small part of your in-class work grade, and I don't accept it late, for any reason.
- Please try very hard not to miss a test. However, sometimes missing a test is unavoidable, and then all the above guidelines for missing a class apply. You will need to make a time outside of class to make up the test.
- If you have been absent and are not ready for a test, you can ask to take the test at a later date. Since there are opportunities to correct mistakes and retake portions of most tests, I might advise you to try the test, and retake if needed.

Grades, Absences, and Lateness:

- The in-class work portion of your grade is based on your thinking and engagement during class. There is no way to make up for this portion of the class if you weren't there – whether you were absent for a very good or a very bad reason. There are no such things as “excused” and “unexcused” absences with me – they're all absences.
- The most important components that go into the in-class grade are difficult to measure. The number of times you are absent or late is easy to measure; however it is not a good indication of your engagement and thinking when you are present.
- The in-class grade is the most subjective of your grades. I will give you midterm feedback to try to make transparent how I think you are doing and what you can do to improve.
- Many students get A's in the in-class portion of the grade. To get an A, be here, be present, and be proactive about your learning. Do the activities, share your thoughts, listen to others' thoughts, and push your classmates and yourself toward better understanding and better work.
- Sometimes when you are sick or injured or facing a personal crisis, you do not work up to your potential. This is just a fact, and it's not always fair. Your grade

in this class is based on the quality of the work you do for the class; it is not a measure of your capabilities or worth.

- If I accept late papers, they are graded the same as the others, without penalty. Grades are based on the quality of the work, not on punctuality.
- I do not grade based on effort. I cannot fairly assess your effort. If your grade is disappointing in the face of much effort, then we can work on how to direct your efforts more effectively.
- Incompletes are granted based on the college's policy, which requires a medical reason. Occasionally, I will accept work after I've submitted grades and change your grade later. It's inconvenient and goes against the rhythm of the semester to change grades after they are in, but if there's a very good reason, I will do it, so you should know that this possibility exists.
- Although there is no way to raise your in-class grade if you've been away for a long time, I will consider giving you an extra assignment to raise another portion of your grade. If I give such an opportunity to you, I will also offer the same opportunity to everyone else in the class. Feel free to ask.
- If you have missed many classes it might be better for you to withdraw from the course and take it again at a later time. Feel free to discuss this option with me or with people from Student Success.

Integrity and Learning from Mistakes

- Just as I expect you to make mathematical mistakes, I also expect you to make mistakes in handling the issues discussed in this handout. As with the course content, the goal is to learn from your mistakes, not to achieve perfection.
- There is no benefit to lying to me. If you make up a "better" reason for why you missed class than the truth, you are likely to cause me to distrust you, which will make it harder for us to have a good working relationship. Your integrity is more important than your grade (and even still, lying will not improve your grade).