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## Excuses, Excuses

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# EXCUSES, EXCUSES

*Ginny Klingenberg*

I'm late in submitting this article to the *Grand Valley Review*, but I really can't think of an excuse. Some students, however, seem to have an inexhaustible supply of excuses for every occasion—missing class, turning in a late assignment, taking an exam late, etc.—and an uncontrollable urge to share them. Many are honest and legitimate explanations; others are nothing more than desperate attempts to absolve themselves from a lack of responsibility; but I must admit that I'm impressed by the creativity that sometimes surfaces.

The proliferation of certain excuses seems to be seasonal. It might be interesting to keep a log of all of the grandparents who die midway through the term when, coincidentally, many major papers are due and exams are given. Perhaps the university should issue a warning to all grandparents of our students—CAUTION: MIDTERMS MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH! We could even limit the number of times each grandparent is permitted to die.

Physical and emotional ailments are probably the most common excuses we hear: "I was sick"; "I had a doctor's appointment"; or, more detailed, "I was really, really, really, really sick—throwing-up sick"; "I'm dealing with a myriad of personal problems"; "I have A.D.D. and can't get to class on time"; "I had a touch of leukemia"; "I have hemorrhoids and it's too painful to sit through class"; "I was really, really sick—Uhh—I had worms."

Sometimes ailments spill over from relatives and friends: "My (insert appropriate relationship) had a heart attack, so I was at the hospital last night"; "I had a family emergency—my sister ran away"; "I have to go to my aunt's funeral"; "I had to take my roommate to the hospital (appendicitis or something)"; "My friend had family problems and she needed to talk to me"; or, reaching a little further, "My boyfriend's grandfather had a heart attack." On occasion students don't keep careful track of the excuses they've already used. One such student reported, "I missed the midterm because my father had a heart attack and died." At the end of the semester the same student said, "I missed the final because my father had a heart attack, and we thought he was going to die."

Even pets are liable to interfere with the educational process: "My dog stepped on my assignment and tore it"; "My cat peed on it"; "My gerbil was sick"; "My dog (cat, fish) died this morning"; "My cat was chasing a mouse and it knocked the plug for my alarm clock out of the wall."

It's amazing how Alzheimer's Disease can strike even the college-age person: "I forgot it was due today"; "I left it home by mistake"; "I lost my disk"; "I thought it was due next Tuesday"; "I can't find it—I swear it was right here"; "I don't know anything about the assignment."

Family members are easy to blame: "My mother threw my paper away while she was cleaning up"; "My brother picked it up with his homework"; "My mom accidentally took it to work with her"; "My little sister erased my file." Complete strangers also get into the act: "Someone took my book with my assignment"; "Someone stole my book"; "My bag was stolen with my computer disk and all of my drafts in it"; "I put my paper in your mailbox (or gave it to the secretary)—didn't you get it?"

Time conflicts can be a problem: "I had to work late"; "I had to finish a paper for another class"; "I have to do an autopsy"; "I have to leave early for baseball"; "I have an appointment to get my taxes done"; "My great-grandmother got married"; "I have to go to Grenada." Some students don't understand that their priorities may not be in accord with those of their professors: "What am I going to do about the paper and presentation due next week? I'm going deer hunting with my husband. Can I FAX it to you?" One student who had exceeded the maximum number of absences in a class asked, "Is it all right if I miss class? I want to go to Daytona to a rock concert."

Modern technology, intended to make life easier, sometimes backfires or gives some people more excuses: "The computer lost my file"; "My word processor ran out of ink"; "The power went out and my alarm clock didn't wake me up"; "The power went out and I couldn't see to study." Transportation doesn't always work out: "I had a flat tire"; "My car wouldn't start"; "I ran out of gas on the way here"; "The key got stuck in my ignition"; "I locked my keys in the car"; "My paper flew out the car window"; "The roads are really bad. The state police told me not to come."

Some excuses are best left unspoken: "A couple of my roommates were arrested, so I have to wait for them to call about bail"; "I was in jail"; "I was in court in Detroit, but one of the cases against me was dismissed"; "I witnessed a drive-by shooting and I had to go into the witness protection program"; "It is against my religion to study this material"; "This is Bill's father. I won't be in class today"; "I didn't know we were going to be in the computer lab today and I just glued on my fingernails this morning, so I can't type." Maybe a component of freshman orientation ought to be on student excuses. Certainly students should be directed *never* to say to a professor, "I missed class yesterday. Did I miss anything?"

Perhaps with the introduction of PhoneMail to the campus, we could simplify the process: You have reached the phone mail of (insert name). If you want to leave an excuse for missing class, press "1." (If "1" is pressed, the message continues.)

If you were sick, press "1."

If you had car trouble, press "2."

If you overslept, press "3."

If you were in jail, press "4."

If a relative died, press "5."

If your pet was sick, press "6."

If you were abducted by aliens, press "7."

If you need to speak with someone immediately, press "0" and "#", to reach a secretary who will give you an excuse for why your professor is not in the office. And have a nice day.