

# A LINE ON LIFE

8/28/85, Updated 8/1/02

## Less Than Enthusiastic Letter of Recommendation

David A. Gershaw, Ph.D.

Near the start of the last school year, I wrote an article on the effective teacher. This year, I will to the opposite. I will write about the ineffective student. In an information pamphlet for psychology majors, Dr. William Nish (Georgia College) told his students "*How to Receive a Somewhat Less Than Enthusiastic Letter of Recommendation*." I have adapted some of his "*tongue-in-cheek*" suggestions, so that they can apply to any student in high school or college.

1. Treat your teachers and class work as if you are able to tolerate them, but just *barely*. You can do this by whispering to another student or by casually looking around the classroom, while the teacher is lecturing.
2. When the teacher provides you with learning opportunities, be sure to respond to his efforts as if he was out of his mind to give you all this work.
3. Be quick to apply such meaningful and concise labels as "*busy-work*," "*irrelevant*" and "*boring*" to anything you do not like or understand. This not only gives you a quick way to "*put the teacher down*;" it also avoids the inconvenience of having to comprehend something before you judge it.
4. Always be ready with reasons why you are an exception to the rules established for the class — like due dates and graded work.
5. Avoid taking exams at the same time and under the same conditions as the rest of the class. Take it for granted that the teacher will give you a make-up exam whenever you are good and ready *regardless* of your reason for missing the exam.
6. Never raise any question or make any contribution to what is being discussed in class, even when your teacher urges you to do so.
7. Be very casual about class attendance. When you see your teacher, be sure to ask, "*Did I miss anything important in class yesterday?*" (This does wonders for a teacher's ego.) Expect the teacher to give you a "*blow-by-blow*" recital of all the things you missed — instead of taking the responsibility of getting the information from a classmate. Be especially quick to point out to the teacher that you are not responsible for the assignments made on days when you are absent.

8. Be consistently late for class and other appointments. This shows others that you are much busier than they are.
9. Whenever you are given an out-of-class assignment that requires library work, immediately ask the teacher to help you find the references. It is especially important that this is done *before* you look for the references yourself, or you may put yourself in the dangerous position of having to learn how to use the library.
10. Do not read your assignments *before* class lecture and discussion. This gives you several advantages. You can take up class time by asking questions about things that are clearly explained in the assigned reading. When the teacher refers to points made in the readings, you can also adopt a look of pained confusion. Or, if you have studied and still don't understand the material, maintain the pained-confusion look. If the teacher asks if there are any questions, be sure *not* to respond. This way you can be assured of not understanding the material.

Many teachers could supply additions to the above list. Likewise, I am sure students could make a similar list for teachers.

However, this list does touch on a serious point. Many students assume that all that matters is getting schooling behind you, so you "*can really start to live.*" By publishing this list, I am trying to point out that habits students develop in school — good or bad — will tend to be the ones they have after they finish school. The same seems to apply to the reputation you establish.

---

## **Better recommendations can lead to a brighter future.**

---

So — before you develop a bad reputation to earn a "*less than enthusiastic letter of recommendation*" — form efficient work habits. As a start, it would help to do things the *opposite* of the way they are described in the above list. Good work habits — at school or on the job — tend to lead to better letters of recommendation. In turn, positive recommendations tend to lead to more opportunities and a brighter future.