

# Dealing with Problems: Personal Responsibility in School

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Updated on Oct 26, 2010

When some students miss class or turn in an assignment late (or not at all), they may think ignoring the problem or pretending there isn't a problem will make it go away. One of the things you learn throughout school, though, is how to take responsibility for your actions (or lack of actions). The following sections cover how to handle common problems such as missing a class, a homework assignment, a test, or other work.

## **Extra Credit**

See whether your instructor allows for extra-credit assignments. If you have poor grades because of an absence, you may be able to bring those grades up by doing extra-credit assignments.

## **Miss a Class**

If you miss a class, first explain to the instructor why you were absent. Most instructors are understanding if you have a valid reason for missing class (such as you were sick), but don't assume the instructor knows why you missed class. On your first day back (or even before you return, if you can e-mail or leave a phone message), make sure your instructor knows why you missed class.

Next, find out from your instructor what happened during the class. While you shouldn't expect your instructor to redo the class just for you, he should be able to tell you what class activities you missed (lecture? group discussion? quiz? test? worksheet?). The instructor may also be able to provide you with any handouts and assignments given during the class. If not, ask another student and make copies.

When you know what you've missed, you can seek to catch up by completing the appropriate worksheets by borrowing notes from a classmate if the instructor gave a lecture the day you were gone, by scheduling a retake of the quiz (if allowed), and so on.

Let your instructor know that you're interested in making up the work and turn in the missing work as soon as possible. This shows responsibility on your part. For some class activities and assignments, you may not be allowed to turn in the work late. For example, your instructor may not allow makeup quizzes. If not, you have to suffer the consequences of receiving a 0 or F for that assignment.

### **Miss a Test**

If you miss a test, make arrangements immediately to take the test. Like missing a regular class, make sure your instructor understands why you missed class (especially if you had a valid reason and weren't just skipping school that day). Be prepared to take the test your first day back, even if you were sick the day the test was given.

Your makeup exam is important, so you need to know exactly when the instructor plans to give the makeup. For example, do you need to take the makeup exam the day you return to school? If so, get any study materials you need from school and study from home. If you missed a study session, ask a classmate to borrow his or her notes. If the instructor schedules the makeup test later (not your first day back), be prepared and don't put off or reschedule the exam. Get it done as soon as possible so that the information is fresh in your mind.

### **Miss a Deadline or Assignment Date**

For homework and other assignments, check with your instructor about the requirements and any penalties for late work. If you just forgot to do the homework, your instructor may not be as forgiving as if you were out sick with strep throat. Even then, some instructors don't allow missed assignments to be turned in late.

The grade or points for homework may be lessened for late assignments. That doesn't mean that you just shouldn't do the work, however. Your instructor will appreciate your commitment to doing your work, even if it is late and you're docked a grade.

For major assignments, your instructor may build in checkpoints to make sure you're on track for the assignment. For example, you may have to turn in your topic, and then later, your outline. You may have to show some of the research you've done for your assignment as you work toward the deadline. These frequent checks help spot students who are struggling and haven't started the assignment or are stuck on some part of it.

As soon as you realize that you're struggling with a major assignment or any milestone for that assignment and may be late, schedule a meeting with your instructor to discuss your progress. Your instructor may be able to give advice to get you back on track. She may be able to help you if, for example, your topic isn't a good match for the assignment (see Chapter 7). If you're struggling to find resources, your instructor may be able to suggest sources with information that can help you complete your assignment. If you have trouble getting started, your instructor may have some tips on how to generate ideas and get them down on paper. For the best response from your instructor, however, ask for this help well in advance of your deadline.

In extenuating circumstances, your instructor may even give you an extension. For example, if you were out of school for several weeks with mononucleosis, your instructor may be more lenient in helping you catch up on all the work you missed. If you had a death in the family or some other traumatic event, your instructor is likely to be sympathetic and can help you come up with a reasonable plan to make up the work you missed.

The key is to be honest rather than make excuses or blame your tardiness or lack of preparation on something or someone else. Also, the sooner you alert your instructor to your problems, the better chance you have at getting the help you need.

And finally, the best way to avoid late assignments is to not procrastinate. It's common for students to put off assignments until the last minute, especially if those assignments are difficult or complex. Try a different approach: Break down big projects into smaller, more manageable steps. As you complete each step, you become more confident, and the work doesn't seem as overwhelming. Before you know it, your work will be done!