Classroom etiquette for students
Based on a text by Brett and Kate McKay

1. **Above all else: You’re an adult; act like one.** If you’re in a university, you’re likely at least 18 years old — the age at which you’re legally considered an adult. You may not feel like a responsible, grown person yet, but your professors will (or should be able to) assume that you are. So act likewise. The specific advice that follows basically tries to answer the question, “How should a mature, well-adjusted, courteous adult act?” Before you say or do anything in the classroom, ask yourself that question. Doing so will save you from embarrassment and engender the respect of your classmates and professors.

2. **Arrive on time.** When you arrive late to class, it can create a big distraction for the professor and for your classmates. So practice the art of punctuality by arriving a few minutes early. Use that time before class to get ready and to review your reading and notes from the previous lecture. Professors often use the first minutes to deliver important/useful/practical information: you do not want to skip those, especially if they concern your exam or assignments. If you are really detained by something important, and can only arrive late, try to slip in as quietly as possible. After the lecture, ask your classmates (and not your professor) to update you about the part you missed.

3. **Come to class prepared.** Besides helping you get the most out of class, coming to a lecture prepared is a matter of showing respect. The professor has likely spent a lot of time preparing to teach, so reciprocate by coming prepared to learn. Do the reading and have your assignments finished before class.

4. **Turn off the smartphone and put it away.** By texting, tweeting, and engaging in all other forms of smartphone fondling, you’re basically telling the professor that seeing how many likes your latest Facebook post has gotten is more important than what he has to say. And don’t think you’re fooling the professor whenever you hold your phone in your lap and under the desk. Staring at your crotch and smiling isn’t normal behavior. If you need to have your phone on for an emergency (wife’s giving birth, parent’s on deathbed), let the professor know in advance and set your phone to vibrate. Leave the classroom before taking the call.

5. **Take part in the discussion.** Many of your classes will rely heavily on discussion. In fact, a part of your grade may depend on your “classroom participation.” Besides helping your grade, taking part in classroom discussion is just good manners. As someone who has been in the role of teacher, nothing is more demoralizing than spending hours preparing thoughtful discussion questions only to face the sound of chirping crickets and blank stares. Do your part to help the professor’s lesson plan along by actively participating in discussion.

6. **Don’t be afraid to disagree with the professor.** S/he’s not God. Besides, s/he will likely want some dissent in the classroom. It’s what makes learning interesting and engaging. However, always remember to:

   6a. **Be respectful, particularly during heated discussions.** In some of your classes controversial topics will come up. Do your best to remain calm, level-headed, and a bit detached during such discussions. This stance serves two purposes. First, it’s a matter of basic civility. There’s no excuse for yelling or resorting to personal attacks during a classroom discussion (or anywhere
else for that matter). Second, it makes you a better student. Come term paper or exam time, your professor will expect you to thoroughly analyze controversial issues. This will require you to look at both the strengths and weaknesses of a particular argument. If you’re cemented in your opinion about a topic, you risk not being able to engage all the pertinent issues as thoroughly as your professor expects, and as a consequence, your grade may suffer.

6b. **Not dominate the discussion or question asking.** While you should take part in classroom discussion, don’t dominate it. First, you’re denying your classmates an opportunity to participate. Second, by raising your hand and offering a soliloquy after every question your professor asks, you are more likely to annoy rather than please him/her.

7. **Don’t be afraid to speak up if you don’t understand something.** Of course, don’t be the guy who’s constantly raising his/her hand with question after question. Your professor likely has a schedule of topics s/he needs to hit during the lecture. By asking an inordinate amount of questions, you’re throwing a wrench in that plan. Also, excessive question asking can get on the nerves of your fellow classmates. If you have a lot of questions, respect your professor’s and classmates’ time by taking them up with your professor after class or during his/her office hours.

8. **Don’t ask questions that are designed less to get an insight from the professor and more to show off your own knowledge.**

9. **If you’re using your laptop to take notes, don’t use it to surf the internet.** First, by not paying attention to the professor, you’re showing him/her disrespect. Second, surfing the web during class can also distract your classmates sitting behind you. No whatsoever surfing is allowed: no email, no social network and not even Wikipedia for checking out the information that is being delivered in class: you are having an opportunity to hear this information from a living person who spent years to acquire that knowledge. Use that opportunity. You always have time to visit Wikipedia later.

10. **Things to never say or ask a professor:**
    - “I need to get a 10 in this class!” – This is your responsibility, not your professor’s. S/he is there to help you learn, because it’s his/her job and because very likely s/he believes in teaching. But you have to work for your mark. You get 10 by doing the work, showing up to class, contributing to your learning environment and others’, and by exceeding your professor’s expectations.
    - “Did I miss anything important yesterday?” First, this isn’t a polite question...professors don’t hold some classes just for the heck of it. Every class is important. Second, don’t ask your professor for notes on what you missed. It’s not his/her responsibility that you couldn’t make it to the lecture. Instead, ask your classmates for their notes.
    - “Can you extend the deadline for the assignment?” Most likely, your professor has done his/her best to fix as reasonable a deadline as possible, and not rarely s/he had agreed on it with you all, at the beginning of the course. So: take your responsibilities (see point 1: be adult!) and organize your time in such a way that you are not reduced to do all the work in the last day. Do not use excuses like relatives getting sick, pets dying, computer breaking and so on: your professor has heard them hundreds of times, so s/he is not very likely to believe you. Moreover: to learn to meet deadlines is an excellent exercise of maturity. One day, your job will depend on this skill.
11. **No chatting and snickering during class.** University isn’t high school. It’s disrespectful to the professor and to your classmates who are actually trying to pay attention.

12. **Practice good email etiquette.** Don’t begin your emails with “Hey.” Spell your professor’s name correctly. Use detailed subject lines. Use spellcheck and check your email for grammatical errors. Try to keep your emails short. You see yourself as just one person with one question, but remember that your professor may have hundreds of others students, all of whom see themselves just as you do. Reading through tons of novel-length emails and coming up with an answer for them is time-consuming and draining. So if you have lots of questions, visit your professor during his office hours instead of asking them all in an email. Answering several, complicated questions is much easier in person than through email. Civil communication ideally requires the same investment of time from each party.

13. **Check your email.** Students not checking email has become a big problem these days. Your professor will likely communicate class changes or cancellations via email. So make sure to check it regularly. Also, if you emailed him/her with a question, make sure to check for a response and give a quick “thanks” for his/her trouble. You wouldn’t believe how far a simple acknowledgment and a little gratitude will get you with someone.

14. **Respect your professor’s time.** Professors may linger after class a bit for students to ask questions. If you have a question, feel free to approach your professor, but don’t monopolize his/her time. This isn’t the place to ask about his/her complete thoughts on Plato’s dialogues. S/he likely has other things to do, and there might be other students who’d like to talk to him/her as well. If you feel like you need to continue the conversation, visit him/her during office hours.

15. **When you do visit your professor during his/her office hours, respect their time by coming prepared with a list of specific questions.** Don’t just show up and say, “I need help” and force the professor to spend 30 minutes figuring out what exactly you need. Also be sure to respect your time slot. If you have a 30-minute window, don’t ask another complex question 29 minutes in.

16. **Before recording a professor, ask for permission first.** Classroom lectures are intellectual property of the professor. By recording it without the professor’s consent, you are in effect violating a copyright. So ask before hitting the record button.

17. **Take care of “business” before class, but if nature calls during the lecture, just get up and go.** You’re a grown person. No need to ask for permission — simply leave the classroom with as little fanfare as possible.

18. **Don’t put your stuff away until class is actually over.** No matter how long your class is scheduled for – whether 60 minutes or 90 minutes – that’s how long your class is. Not 55 minutes. Not 85 minutes. So don’t start packing away your stuff five minutes before class. This has become a bit of a plague in classrooms today. It’s a distraction to your classmates and just rude to your professor. Wait until the professor says “see you tomorrow” or “class dismissed”.

19. **If you need to leave early, let the instructor know in advance.** No explanation here. Just common courtesy.
20. **Try hard not to fall asleep.** No professor wants to look out and see rows of comatose students. Honestly, when it’s right after lunch and the classroom is warm, it can feel like someone shot you in the neck with a tranquilizer-dipped blow dart; keeping your eyelids open can seem near impossible. Just do your best. Remember that part of your job as student is also fighting boredom: it elevates your threshold of attention, and make you ready for always more complex and difficult things.

21. **Skipping class once or twice a semester is okay, but don’t let it become a habit.** You’ve overslept by 20 minutes, you’re sick with flu, etc. All of those are fine; life happens. In the midst of late night partying and playing Grand Theft with your friends, however, skipping class can become a nasty habit. Yes, it’s disrespectful to the professor, but you’re really hurting yourself, and your wallet. Don’t waste money on your education so you can sit in your dorm and play video games. You’re only short-changing yourself and your future.