Hey, Didactic Readers! Let's play a game!

Imagine you're a college English teacher. To put yourself in the mindset, feel free to engage in any character-establishing exercise you choose. Perhaps start by envisioning the right educational environment. Imagine yourself in a linoleum and formica box cozy office setting, nestled within an ivy-covered building, a bastion of sophisticated intellectualizing, a sanctuary for enthusiastic, rapier-sharp dialogue that crackles between teacher and student. What the hell -- go ahead and give yourself a view too, of grassy knolls where students stroll between shady trees, carrying heavy books about Philosophy. You're there to pick up a few items for the summer, and you've paused to sit, gaze out your window, and contemplate the great great great attitudes of the students you finished teaching just two months ago.

Bing! You've just received an email. Go ahead and open it.

Dear Professor,
I know the semester has been over for several weeks now and I hope you are having a wonderful summer with your family! You deserve a nice break from all us students haha!

I wanted to tell you that I enjoyed your class so much this Spring semester and thank you for everything! I saw on my transcript that I received a B and would like to discuss it with you. As you know I was an active member of your class every session for the most part. I was only late and absent during that situation in April that I talked to you about before (I won't bore you by explaining the details again here!) Plus I rewrote every assignment when you told me to and never used my cell phone in class after the first week when you told us how you felt about that.

Plus after that, you should know that if I don't get an A in your class I will be on probation and probably be kicked out of school after an incident that isn't worth describing in this email.

I am very devoted to school because of teachers like you and hope that you can find it in your heart to raise my grade from a B to an A (An A- will not be enough to lift my GPA up to passing.)

Thank you for your prompt response and I know you will do the right thing since I need to graduate in December.

Sincerely,
Tyler FakeName

Now your turn!  You tell me -- what do you say to this student?  Write your response to Tyler FakeName below.  You tell me what you'd say, and then I'll tell you what mine was.  Best response gets a really cool imaginary prize that I made up! Maybe a unicorn with excellent verbal skills who can grade papers and run errands for you!  Then, we'll discuss what we've learned about the nature of college students today!!!  Fun!!!

You might also like:

Random Tuesday Thoughts: Student Email Results, Selling Our ...  Seven Days  Do NOT Make Fun of My Monkey.

36 comments:

chksngr  July 7, 2010 at 7:54 AM

Dear Tyler FakeName,

I so appreciate your positive comments about my class and my teaching. It restores my faith in humanity.

Once the grades are in the system, I'm afraid they don't get changed. Some kind of crazy school policy...Which I totally don't understand since there are so many engaging in revisionist history in our country these days...but I digress.

I recommend summer school. A student who loves learning as much as you do should want to spend all your days soaking up knowledge anyway. Think Painting, or Intro to Watersports...perhaps even Time Management in a Crisis or How to Write a Letter that Actually Gets Results. Just make sure that whatever you take transfers so you aren't going to school just to go to school...although I know exceptional learners like you enjoy school for school's sake.
Just so you know, AP ain't so bad. You don't get kicked out of school. You just have to work really hard and not spend so much time laying in your bikini on Armacost Beach next semester. At least that was what worked for one of my fellow students when we were in college.

Best of luck!

Professor

Reply

chksngr  July 7, 2010 at 7:55 AM

OH...and I don't care about the verbal skills, as long as that unicorn can mop and do laundry...

Reply

McGuire  July 7, 2010 at 8:10 AM

Hey Dude!

I like, totally get you, man! It bites that the system doesn't want you to graduate and it, like, WAY bites that the system won't let me change your grade! Yah, I know that "thing" you had goin' on earlier in the year make it like, totally hard to concentrate at school. And I know that my way-back rules about cell phones just sort of confused you for the first few weeks. Srily, I GET you! In fact, I got my own things goin' on, but I gotta put on a "face" for you guys. LOL.

Well, all I can suggest is that you get one of your hacker friends to get into the system and change your grade to what it's s'posed ta be, cuz we all know you deserve it, yo. I'm trapped by the ruzl ovah here.

Let me know if you have some luck, cuz I like, totally need a raise and stuff.

And if that doesn't work, then I'm stoked you'll be here another semester, cuz you da man, man!! Glad I got to chat w/you. Ty - c ya in Septembah!

Yo,
The Prof

Reply

Karl Kline  July 7, 2010 at 8:14 AM

Tyler, Dahling:

Very impressive use of flattery and your grammar isn't too bad, either.

However, as you glossed over the mysterious incident that was significant enough to put you in the situation you find yourself--one that leads you to unseemly grovelling--as "not worth describing in this email," you do show you've not learned one of the basics of rhetoric: Don't raise questions in your reader's mind you don't want answered.

I did the right thing when I awarded you the grade you earned in class.

Perhaps you can do the right thing and learn that the only person responsible for your graduation is you.

Also sincerely,

Pirate.

Reply

Homemaker Man  July 7, 2010 at 8:24 AM

Dear Tyler:

OMG dude! Who are you again?

Sincerely,
Your loving professor

Reply

Ruthie July 7, 2010 at 8:31 AM

Dear Tyler,

Go to summer school. Or community college, since you're too late to attend this summer session now.

Or take another class in the Fall and get an A.

Either way, even if I could change your grade -- which I can't; the computer doesn't allow it -- I wouldn't go out of my way to enable someone who cared so much that he waited until TWO MONTHS (not a few weeks, Tyler; it's been TWO MONTHS) after the semester was over to contact me about his grade.

You earned a B, so that's what you got. Earning an A (not an A-) is significantly tougher, so next time you need an A in a class, make sure to do A-level work.

Sincerely,
Prof. Pirate Channelling Mean Angry Student

Reply

Leslie July 7, 2010 at 8:50 AM

Dear Tyler,

I read every word of your touching letter for the most part.

Per your suggestion, I've looked all around in my heart and can find nothing that tells me to change your grade.

Although I'm a big proponent of personal responsibility, oddly I don't feel personally responsible for your plight. I guess that's why I became a professor instead of going after that bail bondsman gig.

I wish you a long and proactive life.

Sincerely,
Simon Legree

Reply

One Blonde Girl July 7, 2010 at 8:57 AM

Wow. I got nothing. Maybe I shouldn't have read the other suggested letters first. They totally destroyed my confidence in my ability to write a really kick-ass response. I'm filled with all sorts of self-doubt now. I'm traumatized. Devastated.

Can I get an A now? I mean, I know I didn't do the assignment, but I have a really good excuse. PSTD, man, PSTD. Thanks. I really deserve an A. It would really boost my self-confidence.

Reply

Beta Dad July 7, 2010 at 9:52 AM

Hello,

Professor Pirate is out of the office until September.

Have a great summer!

Sincerely,

Professor D.Pirate
Department of Good Writing
Very Large State University
Dear Tyler Fakename,

Thank you for the kind words about my teaching. I was just thinking about the wonderful students we have at this school, full of a longing for knowledge and a zest for life.

I appreciate that you did what I told you to do. That demonstrates the kind of courtesy that gets your toe into the door of life. The politeness and considerateness that make other people want to further your ambitions. And I am glad that you have the ambition to graduate. I really am.

Yet the grade you got in my course was generous for the work you provided, as I recall. Don't make me take a second look at it. You might not like what happens. However much sympathy I have for your plight and however much I too want the school get you out the door, my first duty is to this school's high intellectual standards and to fairness among all my students, some of whom handed in truly A-level work. If you have an individual assignment that you think I misgraded, I would be happy to review it and discuss it with you in person.

Sincerely,

Your Professor

--Tumbleweed

I will not change your grade. If you needed an A, you should have earned an A. I consider this matter closed.

Please do not contact me with any more unethical nonsense.

Sincerely,

Your Professor

Midwestern Mama Holly

Thank you for your kind words regarding my class and your experience in it. I am always looking for feedback so that I may enhance the classroom experience for my students.

As to the matter of your grade. I regret to inform you that I will not be changing it as you requested. The reason is simple. You got the grade that you deserved. The grade that reflected your work.

I understand that this may not be the answer that hoped for. Too bad you ungrateful simpering little shit.

Suck it up. Life is hard, and often not fair.

Enjoy the rest of your summer.
Respectfully,
Professor Kiss My Ass
Reply

Anne  July 7, 2010 at 12:16 PM
Dear Tyler,

Thank you so much for your comments and request. I wish I could help you, but I don't want to.

Have a great summer.
Professor X
Reply

Miss Nikki  July 7, 2010 at 12:47 PM
Dear Tyler,

I'm sorry, can you send me that letter again? As I was reading it, a dog jumped on me and ate it, I won't bore you with the details. But I didn't get to the point of what it was you needed before being attacked.

I am also glad you contacted me. I meant to talk to you about your final grade. That may have been the reason why your wrote me? To thank me for giving you not only a passing grade, but an above average grade? Initially I had you written as a "fail" but my heart softened by your overzealous participation in class. Hopefully, the shy students will get a word in next year. But I'm sure it helped break the ice even if it did interrupt the theory portions of the courses.

No need to thank me for passing you. And yes, my much deserved summer is wonderful away from the students ha ha. Once again, if your request was urgent, you can forward it in September when I return to campus. Otherwise you can thank me in person next year.

Your Amazing Professor Pirate
p.s. please do not enroll in my class again, or may I suggest a more suitable level course such as English - second language?
Reply

Didactic Pirate  July 7, 2010 at 1:00 PM
My love for you people is overflowing. Many of you are way nicer than me. Most of you wield sarcasm with the skill of a Jedi Knight -- something I like to believe I do as well. Someone is SO gonna earn that unicorn when this game is completed.

Some early results:

chknsgr -- points for suggesting summer school. Bonus points for recalling the seductive pull of Armacost Beach in the Spring.

McGuire -- impressive strategy speaking to Tyler in his vernacular. But you're too nice.

Karl -- points off for thinking that the student will ever, ever understand the nature of responsibility. You should know better, Mister.

Homemaker Man -- you are currently winning.

Ruthie -- funny, you speak as someone who has been in my classes before, and heard me rail about students who slack.

Leslie -- how did you know that my second career choice is a a bail bondsman?

OneBlondeGirl -- I will give you until the end of the day. You and I both know you can make this kid cry if you choose.
Beta -- Your reply is the most practical, and the one I tend to use in the summertime. And probably the only one that Tyler will understand.

Burk -- outstanding balance of both nurturing and veiled threat. I like it.

Steam Me Up -- well, duh. I should've mentioned that the criteria for getting an A in the class is such.

Tumbleweed -- you are professional and concise. Students will be confounded.

Midwestern Mama -- you had me at "simpering little shit." I'm feeling the urge to propose to you.

Anne -- If we broke yours up into three lines, it would almost be a haiku. Gracefully poetic. Plus I laughed out loud.

Didactic Pirate
July 7, 2010 at 1:01 PM
Miss Nikki -- I love yours because it mirrors reality -- the B I gave this kid was a GIFT.

James (SeattleDad)
July 7, 2010 at 2:09 PM
Tyler,
If you put as much imagination into class assignments as you did in plotting out this email, you would have already earned that A.

I'll probably see you at lunch sometime. I eat out often.

Professor Pirate.

WannabeVirginia W.
July 7, 2010 at 3:14 PM
Tyler,
You ignorant whore - go get me a latte then come and see me and I can explain to you why I cannot change your grades and give you ideas on how to successfully, use guilt and passive aggressive messages in your e-mails that will get you the results you want.

Truly,
Professor all that and a bag of Doritos.

Meg
July 7, 2010 at 3:53 PM
Dear Tyler,

"A" for effort! Alas, "B" for my class.

Take care,
Professor D. Pirate

Emerald Louise
July 7, 2010 at 4:10 PM
I love all these responses as much as the original post. Beta Dad's and Tumbleweed's come closest to my actual response to this sort of thing, so I love them for their validation. For making me laugh the hardest and saying the things I dearly want to say in a deliciously direct and concise way, I love Leslie/Simon L's. :) I love Karl's for, in
particular, "I did the right thing when I awarded you the grade you earned in class." I love that every one of these made me giggle, which I've never been able to do in response to this situation before.

I have long considered adding a policy to my syllabus stipulating that any time a student requests that I review/reconsider/recalculate a semester grade with which s/he does not agree, it WILL be changed, guaranteed: if I discover that I did, in fact, make an error in calculating and/or recording the grade, it will be corrected accordingly. If I discover that I did NOT make a mistake and that the grade entered was indeed the grade earned, it will be lowered one half letter (e.g. B to B-). I haven't done this, only because I doubt the department and/or university would back me up on it. But OH, I really, really want to.

SciFi Dad  July 7, 2010 at 4:25 PM
This comment has been removed by the author.

SciFi Dad  July 7, 2010 at 4:26 PM
Dear Tyler,

Setting aside the fact that your performance in my class is not related to common courtesy or etiquette for a moment, let's talk about why you waited so long to contact me.

Logically, it must be due to the fact that you already asked all the "cool" teachers who would be more likely to "help". To that end, I do not care for being a last resort and therefore deny your request.

Perhaps, in the future, you can use your sense of entitlement to get you someplace. Sadly for you, that is not the case here.

Best,
Professor P.

SciFi Dad  July 7, 2010 at 4:26 PM

WannaBeV -- I love every part of it. If I thought I could call students whores without getting in trouble... then again, maybe I can. I just haven't tried it yet.

Meg -- to professional, not enough vitriol! Where's the seething anger?

Emmy Lou -- I know. And I know you know. Holy crap, do we both know.

SciFi Dad -- You hit upon a crucial point. The semester did in fact end in mid-May, and I received this email two days ago, not long after bragging to my colleagues how I hadn't received any post-semester emails like this, for the first time in a long while. And then bam. I believe he was hitting up his pushover teachers first, and I am one of his last resorts to do some GPA damage control. Which, alas, ain't happening.

Karl -- you're right. I should pay everyone who posted above for the replies. Instead, I'm just giving away the one unicorn.

Stephanie  July 7, 2010 at 6:00 PM
Dear Mr. Fakename,
When you assemble your own burrito, it is very bad form to chew on it for awhile and then send it back to the kitchen as defectively made. It is utterly ridiculous to insist that the burrito be sent back to you as steak and potatoes.

You barely earned your B. Use this opportunity to take ownership of your own life and dig yourself out of probation. It might well prove to be the best thing you ever do for yourself.

Sincerely,
Professor Pirate

Reply

Didactic Pirate July 7, 2010 at 8:10 PM
I should've mentioned that anyone who employs a burrito metaphor automatically wins the game. Well played, Stephanie.

Reply

Stephanie July 7, 2010 at 8:21 PM
(i don't know how to spell bow-taking ... please imagine it fully, as that is how i am enjoying it)

Reply

One Blonde Girl July 7, 2010 at 8:30 PM
Challenge accepted. I will respond to this email as if this were one of my undergrads (and I'm actually going to be nice here as I could be quite sarcastic and snarky in my responses to my undergrads)...

Dear Tyler Fakename,

As you are well aware, I am on vacation, which means I am not in my office, which also means I do not have my records on hand. That being said, it doesn't really matter as I am always fair with my grading. It was very clearly outlined on the syllabus, the syllabus that you received on the first day of class, what was required of you in order to receive an A. I have no doubt that you were in attendance the first day, therefore I'm sure you were made quite aware of my expectations. If you were concerned at all about your grade prior to the end of the semester, you were certainly welcome to see me during my office hours. May I suggest you contact your other professors, if you haven't already, and see if they can do anything for you. Now if you'll excuse me, I am still on vacation, and I have already wasted too much precious drinking time on this email, an email that I wasn't required to send because, as I previously mentioned, I am on vacation.

Sincerely,
Your Professor

Reply

Captain Dumbass July 8, 2010 at 9:32 PM
Dear Tyler,

Money Talks

Professor Dumbass

Reply

Dingo July 9, 2010 at 6:38 AM
Sweet Baby Jebus! How many times do we have to explain that hard work doesn't automatically equal an A! And yes, I've had more than one student say that they need a certain grade in order to get their internship, job, acceptance into some other program. Not my problem! My problem is to teach the best that I can and make sure you learn, dear student. Your problem is to earn the grade!

Oh my, I felt myself going on a rant. I will end my tirade now, find a nice cool alcoholic beverage, and lie down for a minute or two.
Dingo  July 9, 2010 at 6:44 AM
I will try to gather my composure and come back when the beer buzz has kicked in to post a letter to Tyler "Too Late" Fakename.

Reply

Aunt Becky  July 9, 2010 at 5:25 PM
Dear Tyler,

Who the fuck are you?

xox,

Prof.

Reply

Nubian  July 26, 2010 at 10:34 AM
I will be printing this out for the Golden Child on what not to do when he starts college!

Reply