



Effective Instructional Practice:

Avoiding Instructor Misbehaviors

Alan K. Goodboy, West Virginia University

Instructor misbehaviors are conceptualized as any instructor classroom behavior that interferes with instruction and learning (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). There are literally hundreds of misbehaviors that you can enact inside or outside the classroom that have potential to interfere with student learning, ranging from minor misbehaviors such as not responding to student e-mail messages, arriving late to class, and being disorganized to more serious misbehaviors such as purposely intimidating students, showing favoritism, and not knowing your subject matter (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). Of these misbehaviors, students report that their instructors most frequently misbehave by using ineffective teaching behaviors, deviating from the syllabus, lecturing in a boring manner, grading unfairly, misusing technology, and providing too much information for students to process (Goodboy & Myers). Conversely, instructors infrequently misbehave by using sarcasm and putdowns, communicating aggression, being inaccessible to students, lacking professionalism, and not showing up to class. Most instructor misbehaviors communicate to students a level of *incompetence* if you lack basic teaching skills, *offensiveness* if you are perceived as mean or cruel, or *indolence* when you are viewed as absent minded and lazy (Vallade & Myers, 2014).

Avoiding instructor misbehaviors is crucial for three reasons. First, instructor misbehaviors impede student learning outcomes including cognitive learning, affective learning, state motivation, and communication satisfaction (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2009; Goodboy & Myers, 2015; Hazel, Crandall, & Caputo, 2014; Sidelinger, Bolen, Frisby, &

McMullen, 2011; Vallade & Malachowski, 2015; Wanzer & McCroskey, 1998; Zhang, 2007), as well as student interest and engagement (Brockelman-Post, Tacconelli, Guzmán, Rios, Calero, & Latif, 2016).

Second, instructor misbehaviors undermine the credibility of an instructor. Students perceive misbehaving instructors as lacking competence, trustworthiness, and caring in the classroom (Banfield, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006; Semlak & Pearson, 2008; Zhang, Zhang, & Casatellucio, 2011). Third, students respond to instructor misbehaviors with undesirable communication in the classroom. When instructors misbehave, students are less likely to talk to them (Goodboy, Myers, & Bolkan, 2010; Sidelinger et al., 2011), they attempt to influence their instructor in antisocial ways (Claus, Booth-Butterfield, & Chory, 2012), they resist their instructor's requests (Zhang et al., 2011), and they are more likely to express about the course (Goodboy, 2011).

Five Tips for Avoiding Instructor Misbehaviors in the Classroom

1. Misbehaviors are most likely to occur during your lecturing. In fact, ineffective lecturing is perceived by students to reflect misbehavior, especially if you give boring and dry lectures, teach in a confusing manner, use a monotone voice, and teach the course material too quickly (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). Therefore, it is important that you carefully prepare for each class session by incorporating exciting classroom activities, lecturing in a dynamic and enthusiastic manner, remaining mindful of timing and pacing during the lecture, and communicating ideas and concepts in a clear manner. By doing so, you will avoid common lecture misbehaviors.

2. Sticking to your syllabus and semester course schedule is another way to avoid misbehaving. Students will view your syllabus as a contract and appreciate it

when you do not change assignment due dates and scheduled exam dates. Likewise, your students value clear and detailed syllabus language for all your assignments. One of the most commonly cited examples for instructor misbehaviors is "deviating from the syllabus" (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). Therefore, if anything changes in your syllabus or your course schedule needs to be revised, your students would appreciate a copy of the revised syllabus so they can remain current with their assignments and due dates. Print a new syllabus copy even if the revisions are minor. Your better students, particularly those students who are self-regulated in their learning, will plan much of their semester in advance with organizers and calendars, so try not to deviate from the syllabus if at all possible.

3. Just like any other instructor, at times you may become irritated and agitated when you have a frustrating encounter with a problem student. Unfortunately, such an encounter might encourage you to use antagonistic communication, including arguing with students during class, belittling students, criticizing students' responses, and identifying flaws in student thinking or opinions (Goodboy & Myers, 2015). Avoid being antagonistic toward your students, who view this sort of communication as detracting from their learning environment. Instead, try to challenge your students when they are incorrect or irritating, but remain supportive and encouraging of their ideas even if you do not agree with them. A few instances of instructor antagonism can ruin student perceptions of you for the rest of the semester and create a defensive classroom climate (Sidelinger et al., 2011).

4. Respond to all student e-mail message immediately, no matter how unimportant you think they are. Because students flag instructors as misbehaving when

they take too long respond to a message, try to respond to student e-mail messages within 24 hours. Similarly, students appreciate instructors who are competent with technology use in the classroom and who incorporate it into their lectures. An instructor who is inconsistent with e-mail responses and has problems with classroom technology (or uses no technology at all) can be perceived as detracting from an optimal learning experience. Embrace the idea that technology can supplement effective teaching, but using technology does not have to be the main focus of your teaching.

5. Realize that you do not have to accommodate all of your students requests and wishes. Some students hold entitled views about their education and consider your valid classroom decisions such as selecting expensive textbooks, requiring mandatory attendance and participation, and failing to offer extra credit, as instructor misbehaviors. By definition, these examples are merely student preferences and are not misbehaviors because they do not actually interfere with student learning. You do not have to cater to all of your students' preferences. If you are wondering whether a decision you make or a classroom behavior you use is an actual misbehavior or merely a student preference, consult the aforementioned research (Goodboy & Myers, 2015).

Assessing Your Use of Instructor Misbehaviors

To determine how frequently you engage in instructor misbehaviors, consult the original instructor misbehavior typology (Kearney et al., 1991) or the revised typology (Goodboy & Myers, 2015) to identify which misbehaviors you are guilty of using, or have your students anonymously complete the 16-item Instructor Misbehavior Scale, referencing you as the instructor (Goodboy & Myers, 2015).

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