

**Minimal Academic and Scholarly Expectations
for All Graduate Coursework in
Communication Sciences and Disorders**

**OR,
Hints from Your Faculty for
Succeeding in (and even enjoying!) Graduate School**

The faculty of the Communication Sciences and Disorders Program first developed this handout during the summer of 2003 in an effort to help graduate students by being as clear as possible about our universal minimum expectations. This handout is not official “policy”; think of it as friendly (if possibly unsolicited!) advice. Our objective is to prevent problems and misunderstandings by being as explicit as possible, and as consistent as possible, in our expectations of all graduate students, all instructors, and all courses. This information applies to all courses and all activities in the CMSD graduate program, unless a specific instructor provides specific instructions that differ from the information provided here.

1. Professional Demeanor and Behavior, Within and Beyond the Classroom

The ideal in this category is that all instructors and all graduate students should work together to create an environment that can be pleasant, educational, professional, and respectful for everyone, in formal class meetings and in all other interactions. Toward this end, we respectfully request and suggest the following.

☀ Go to class. Exceptions will be made in the case of documented illness or other personal emergency, but on the whole graduate courses require and assume that students attend class. Going to class is important because class meetings are your opportunity to hear, discuss, and work with information that will not be presented anywhere else. And educational research shows high and significant correlations between grades and class attendance!

☀ “Going to class” means arriving in plenty of time to be seated and ready before the class’s official beginning time. It also means staying, and staying attentive, until the instructor has indicated that the class is over. Such consideration of your colleagues is important so everyone can concentrate on the course material without a distracting parade of late arrivals, early departures, and other activities in the classroom.

☀ Be prepared for all class meetings. “Being prepared” means, at a minimum, that all graduate students are expected to have completed, and thought about, all assigned readings, exercises, homework, and so on, before the relevant class meeting. Instructors differ as to whether, and how much, they repeat information in class that was available in the readings, but all instructors will always assume that you have read and thought about the material that they

asked you to read. Doing your reading before class is important because your instructors will assume that you are working to integrate two distinct streams of knowledge: that which they assigned you to learn before each class meeting, and that which they will lead you through during each class meeting. It is often not possible to benefit from the material presented or discussed in class if you do not have the background information that the instructor asked you to get from the readings.

☀ As a general rule, please do not bring your cell phone to class. If you feel that you must bring it on a given day, for a particular reason (e.g., there is a relatively high likelihood of the babysitter trying to reach you, because your child is ill today), please make sure that your phone stays on a silent or vibrator mode, and please sit on the aisle near the door in case it does ring. If your phone does ring during class, and if you must answer it, leave the room quietly and move well away from the classroom door, then answer your phone in the hall.

☀ As a general rule, please think twice about bringing your laptop or other computer to class. Computers can be very useful for taking notes, but if you like typed notes you might do better to take notes by hand and then re-type later (because you then get to spend that extra time thinking about the material). One problem is that computers can be distracting to your fellow students even in the best of circumstances (because keyboards are louder than pens). The bigger problem is that computers brought to class “to take notes” often end up being used to answer email, search the internet, or work on other documents when you should be paying attention to class. All of that is inappropriate. While we recognize the legitimate use of laptops in the classroom, you should also be aware that your instructor may ask you to put away your computer if it becomes a distraction.

☀ Try to participate as an equal member in class discussions. If you think of yourself as a “shy” or quiet person, that’s fine, and you are not expected to change your personality, but it should become your habit to participate actively in class discussions anyway; it is important to remember that we are an applied profession that requires and includes substantial personal and professional interaction. At the other end of the spectrum, if you tend to monopolize classroom discussions (if you realize that you speak out almost every day in almost every course, whereas many of your colleagues have not spoken out in days or weeks), the faculty will expect you to learn to monitor and control your actions in order to allow everyone to participate. This is perfectly parallel to the clinical skill of recognizing that you should be playing a supporting role, not a domineering role, to your clients and their families.

☀ Not only do we expect you to talk a reasonable amount – we also expect your talking to contribute constructively and respectfully to class discussions. “Contributing constructively and respectfully” means that valuable contributions to class discussions move everyone forward toward the goal of a deeper understanding of the material. In general, don’t just aim to talk; aim to say something, or ask something, that is both relevant and more complex than what was just said. Remember, too, that reasonable people can start from different assumptions, interpret things differently, and draw different conclusions; the most constructive and educational classroom discussions are often those in which all participants try to explain their views in a manner that simultaneously demonstrates a respect for, and an attempt to understand, other views. One of the things that might differ between graduate classes and your previous classes is related to the multiple views or perceptions that are possible. Learn to appreciate and enjoy the ambiguity that arises when you realize that there are two or three conflicting views of the same topic, rather than allowing yourself to be confused because there isn’t one “correct” view.

☀ Keep your appointments with supervisors, professors, and your fellow students.

Meetings are time that people have set aside for you, and it is generally inappropriate for you to reschedule. Clinically, in particular, much of your learning will occur in one-on-one meetings with your supervisors, and it is important that you learn and exhibit the professional skill of arriving on time and being prepared for any appointment or any meeting of any size.

☀ Remember that you are now a representative of this program, this clinic, this department, and this university. Athens is a small community, and lots of people come and go through our clinic. They will recognize you when they see you elsewhere, even if you don't recognize them. Whether you are aware of it or not, your actions in public places, including on public internet sites like MySpace or Facebook, will be noticed and interpreted as reflective of the quality, decency, and professionalism of this program, this clinic, this department, and this university.

☀ Finally, try to think of your cohort of students as a group of people who will help you and whom it will be to your benefit, and your clients' benefit, to try to help. Competition with your fellow students was how you got into graduate school; collaboration with your fellow students will be how you get through graduate school. Remember also that you're not just a group of students anymore; you are a group of young professionals who will be collaborating in the care of a group of clients and their families. Make it your habit to attempt to help and support fellow students who need help, not just for their benefit or for yours, but for your clients' benefit.

2. "Graduate Level Learning"

The point of graduate school is to help you to learn things that you do not currently know, and to help you integrate the new material with all the things that you do already know. In an applied discipline like speech-language pathology, furthermore, the point is to push you to learn everything so thoroughly that you can actually go act on it all, in creative ways, as an independent, evidence-based, outcomes-focused clinical service provider. That seems obvious enough on the face of it, but the reality is that learning is hard work, and applying is even harder.

☀ One step that can make it all a little easier is to recognize what is being asked of you. You might mean something very different when you think about "learning" in a course or courses than what your instructors mean, and to the extent that there is a mismatch, you will struggle with the horrible feeling that you can't quite figure out what is expected of you. The first part, of course, is to memorize the facts that are presented in each class's readings and lectures. Learning the facts, however, is probably a very small part of the "point" of a class, and it is certainly a very small part of the point of a graduate education. Much more important is that we will be asking you to "analyze, synthesize, and evaluate" information, and we will expect you to "integrate" information. This means that when your instructors say "graduate level learning," they mean that they will be expecting you to think about the information that is presented to you, think about the context in which that information was presented to you, discover for yourself and be able to explain clearly how that information fits together with other things that we know and that we do not know, decide for yourself whether the information really deserves the status of "fact" or not, and decide for yourself what else this discipline needs. Class discussions will be less about what the facts are, and more about how these purported "facts" were developed, what they and their context imply, and what they and their context should mean to you in a much larger sense. Tests and, in particular, out-of-class assignments will be less about repeating some facts and more about how to find out what your field accepts as fact right now, what has been

accepted as fact in the past, why things are accepted as fact, which facts should not be accepted, and what clinical implications we can reasonably develop, defend, or implement from all of this. Your instructors are not just expecting you to memorize facts; they are expecting you to learn to read differently, write differently, think differently, organize your time differently, and act differently – all of which is much more difficult and much more critical than memorizing some facts.

☼ Along the same lines – your classes are not designed or intended to tell you what to do with a certain kind of client. Your instructors would be doing you and all your present and future clients a grave disservice if all they did was teach you how to do what is currently viewed as the best way to treat a particular kind of disorder. First of all, no two clients are the same; we couldn't possibly teach you what to do with each client even if we wanted to. More importantly, your chosen profession does not know how to treat every disorder. If all we taught you was today's best guess, you would leave graduate school with a set of skills guaranteed to be completely out of date in not more than about 5 years. What we will try to teach you, therefore, is an informational context within which you should be able to figure out for yourself what is a reasonable approach to working with a client, and to figure out for yourself which of the many clinical suggestions you will hear during your career are worthwhile and which are not, so that you can spend your career evolving as your profession evolves. That context includes learning what your field currently understands (and does not understand) about normal and disordered speech, language, swallowing, and hearing; what mistakes your field has made in the past (on the theory that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it); some general principles that will apply across multiple areas; and the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and integrate information. As an example, we are not asking you to learn treatments; we are asking you to learn about treatment. It's an important distinction, and it's another example of how understanding your faculty's expectations can be invaluable to your success.

☼ With all of that in mind – One way to sabotage yourself is to stay so focused on the things you have to memorize, because that's relatively easy to get a handle on, that you don't notice the other, much larger, things that your classroom and clinical instructors are asking you to see and do and master. Another way to sabotage yourself is to stay so focused on the things that you already know and understand (like spending hours coloring picture cards to use with your client) that you don't have any time or energy left over to tackle the new and difficult parts. Instead, seek actively to meet the hard parts head on. Do your reading before class (if the facts are familiar, you'll be able to follow and appreciate the real lessons, which will be about the larger issues). And ask skeptical and scholarly questions, not just of your instructors but of everything you read. Written information is not true or good simply because it's been written down; ask authors questions like “Who are you to claim this? What evidence do you have to support that conclusion? How can you explain your conclusion in light of this other contradictory information that this other author wrote?” Similarly, ask yourself questions like “What connections does my instructor want me to see between this material and what other material? How could I explain the importance of this material to a client? What questions would I ask this researcher or this author if I could talk to her?”

☼ Excellent professional-level writing skills will be critical to your success as a graduate student and as a speech-language pathologist. When we say “writing,” we mean several things. First, even though you will hear the faculty talk about the importance of “creativity” or originality in your ideas, we are referring to technical or professional writing, not creative writing. Second, we are referring not to the ability to get a first draft on paper, but to the ability

to do the necessary editing to create polished, professional, final versions. And third, we are referring to all of the multiple levels of thinking, organization, and execution that are required to create a complete document: the quality of the ideas that you are developing and expressing; the overall structure of your arguments, papers, and clinic reports as complete works; the structure of individual paragraphs and sentences; and the spelling, grammar, and punctuation of all written work. A large part of your graduate career will be spent learning to write in the required styles for clinic reports, professional academic papers, and other applications. These specific professional styles depend on your having a pre-existing ability to write graduate-level English. If you are not completely confident in your ability to develop and defend your ideas in perfectly executed written English, you are encouraged to contact the UGA Writing Center, which is a service of the Department of English:

<http://www.english.uga.edu/writingcenter/about/services.html>

☼ The division of your graduate program into individual “courses” is not because the information from a given course should be kept isolated; it’s just an administrative necessity. Think actively and often about how everything you are learning fits together. Your instructors know what you are learning in your other courses, and they expect you to be able to bring it all together.

☼ Although we do not want to emphasize grades as the outcome of your graduate level learning (knowledge and skills and abilities should be the outcomes), grades are also an administrative necessity. The main thing to know with respect to graduate-level grades is that the bar has been shifted up another notch; this is another way that students and faculty can often have very different expectations. Just as memorizing the facts is only the beginning, graduate students will not be assigned grades of “A” simply for completing an assignment or for repeating what the instructor has already said. The faculty is looking for you to complete the assignment (a) in a thorough, thoughtful, and scholarly way that reflects your true mastery of presented information, related information, and the implications of that information; and/or (b) in a way that reflects your own multiple efforts, not only to learn what the instructor said and what the book said, but also to learn how that information fits with everything else you know and do.

3. Academic Honesty

“Academic honesty” and “academic dishonesty” are difficult to talk about, because any discussion is often interpreted as an accusation of past or future wrongdoing. That is not our goal in bringing up the topic. Our goal here is the same as with all the other ideas in this handout: to prevent problems and misunderstandings by being as explicit as possible, and as consistent as possible, in our expectations of all graduate students, all instructors, and all courses.

One way to change the emphasis of the discussion is to treat academic honesty as just another topic for research and discussion. In fact, many educational researchers do investigate academic honesty as a scholarly topic, and their results are often very interesting. The rest of the information in this section comes largely from Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002), especially their Appendix 2.1 (pp. 37-40).

☼ Some kinds of academic dishonesty are very straightforwardly wrong to both students and faculty, and everybody agrees (e.g., in survey research about this topic) that they are against all the rules and should not be done. Items presented by Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) in this category include such things as copying from somebody else’s paper during an exam,

bringing (unauthorized) notes into an exam, stealing an exam from a professor's office the night before, paying somebody else to write a paper for you and turning it in as if it were yours, or buying a paper off the internet and turning it in as if it were yours.

☼ Other kinds of academic dishonesty are more difficult to deal with because faculty members who participate in research in this area tend to rate them as unacceptable activities, but students tend to rate them as acceptable – another example of an important mismatch between students' assumptions and faculty's expectations. Examples presented by Whitley and Keith-Spiegel (2002) in this category that might be particularly relevant for CMSD graduate students include collaborating with a friend when the professor assumes that an assignment will be conducted individually, not citing in your reference list all the sources that you actually used in writing a paper, citing in your paper and in your reference list sources that you did not actually read, making up data for a lab report or a homework assignment or a client and writing up those data as if they existed or as if you had really done the assignment, changing clinic data or homework data (that you really did collect) “just a little bit” to make them seem “better” in some sense, or allowing someone to copy from your homework. The position of the faculty in CMSD is that these and similar activities are wrong and will not be tolerated. They are examples of academic dishonesty because they detract from the central goal that everything you turn in for any credit toward a degree program, both in your classes and in your clinical assignments, should be your own work, which usually means your own independently completed and carefully documented analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and integration of named, properly credited, and accurately represented source material.

☼ Plagiarism represents a special case for academic dishonesty, often also because of the mismatch between what faculty may see as acceptable and what students may see as acceptable. The CMSD faculty has developed a separate handout and exercise about plagiarism, which includes several examples.

☼ Students are often surprised to learn that the policies of the University of Georgia require students and faculty alike to report any knowledge of “alleged” or “suspected” (not “confirmed” or “definite”) academic dishonesty to the Office of the Vice President for Instruction. When a faculty member suspects that academic dishonesty has occurred, among the faculty member's first actions will be to contact the Vice President's office. This sounds harsh, but it is actually to the student's benefit. It means, for example, that no one else in the department needs to know about the accusation. The instructor does not talk to other instructors or to the department head to try to decide how to handle the incident; instead, she goes immediately to a neutral third party. Similarly, it means that there are standard procedures in place for the entire university, with a neutral third party always overseeing the outcome of any accusation. This way, students can know what to expect and can know that the decision about how to handle any one case will not be made solely by one angry faculty member. It also means that if you ever do suspect a fellow student, you are not expected to handle the problem alone.

☼ After a faculty member (or a student) contacts the Vice President's office, a facilitated discussion will be arranged that will include the student or students, the faculty member, and a facilitator from the Vice President's office. If an agreement can be reached, that is the end of the process. If an agreement cannot be reached, the case moves to a more formal hearing.

☼ All definitions and procedures for academic honesty and dishonesty are available on the Vice President for Instruction's website:

http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/academic_honesty.htm

You have also received a pamphlet called “A Culture of Honesty” in your Department Orientation materials; read it.

4. General Survival Skills

Graduate school is an intensive, busy, overwhelming, and (we hope!) enriching time. You will be asked to do more than you think you can do, and you will be asked to do it all better and faster and in more different ways that you knew existed.

☀ You would not be here if you couldn’t do it. You would not be here if you couldn’t do it. You would not be here if you couldn’t do it.

☀ “You would not be here if you couldn’t do it” means that the faculty selected you from among many other applicants because you have already demonstrated that you are smart, educated, and interested in speech-language pathology. We do not admit more students than we can work with, we do not want students to fail out, we do not let students “try it” if we don’t think they will succeed. Do not convince yourself that you are an exception to this policy; you’re not. You are here because the faculty selected you because the faculty thinks you can do this.

☀ We can’t guarantee that you will succeed, of course; that depends on how you approach and fulfill the many tasks that will be set before you during the next couple of years. It’s not supposed to be easy, and it’s not going to be easy.

☀ Balancing clinical and academic responsibilities is difficult, no two ways about it. Our philosophy as a faculty and as a program is that both are equally important. We expect students to learn to be good at reading and interpreting and applying the research literature, good at academic and clinical writing, good at thinking, good at talking, good at working alone, good at working with others, good at working with children in the clinic, good at working with adults in the clinic, good at working with clients’ families, and good at any number of other aspects of being a scholar and a clinician. Most of these skills apply to both classes and clinic, when you stop and think about them. Try not to think of classes and clinic as two competing pressures; try to think of them as the two mutually-supporting parts of your chosen profession, both being the thing that the other requires to survive.

☀ Use your course syllabi -- read them thoroughly and refer to all parts of them often, not just the list of dates and assigned readings. They include lots of useful and necessary information about each class, including such things as grading rubrics, hints for success, and explicit and implicit information about the instructor’s assumptions and expectations.

☀ To a certain extent, graduate students are supposed to feel overworked, confused, sleep-deprived, and exercise-deprived. Do your very best to be very organized, to look ahead and plan ahead, and to budget your time so that there is enough for the important things. Be aware from the very beginning, too, that graduate school just is not something that can be accomplished between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday – plan to work long hard hours. If it really truly starts to get to you, though, if you start to honestly believe that it’s too much, or if you truly just can’t take it any more, please ask for help before anything goes too seriously wrong in your life – all of your professors and supervisors are always willing to talk, most of them keep a box of Kleenex in their offices, and all of them know how to help you call the Student Health Center to speak to a mental health worker or a counselor or a psychiatrist. You can also always call Student Health yourself (Counseling and Psychological Services is 542-2273; Health Promotion, including HIV testing and relationship/sexual violence prevention,

is 542-8690; the women's clinic is 542-8691), walk in to Student Health (if you say you need to see a mental health worker, they will see you), or call anybody listed in the Athens phone book under "counselors." Please also find the time to look after each other, and dare to intervene on behalf of one of your fellow students if you think it's needed – meddling isn't necessary, but taking care of each other is.

☀ The joy and the payoff is in looking back after the assignment is completed, or at the end of the semester, or at the end of your program, and being able to say "WOW!! Look what I DID!!" – and knowing that you know, and knowing that the world knows, that a master's degree from The University of Georgia is something that you earned, with plenty of good hard work on your part, and that you deserve to be very proud of. The joy and the payoff is also in knowing that you thoroughly and completely understand, and can put to good use, everything that you need to understand to be able to help the people who will come to you trusting that you can help them or their children or their parents. Hang on to that focus as your central goal, and all the rest will be worthwhile.

Reference

Whitley, B.E., Jr., & Keith-Spiegel, P. (2002). *Academic dishonesty: An educator's guide*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.