



Cell Phones, Socializing & Psychotic Behavior

A BRIEF GUIDE TO LIBRARY ETIQUETTE

Charles J. Ten Brink

DURING ORIENTATION, I TELL students that the Library is intended to be a welcoming place, a home away from home, a sanctuary, a refuge. We really do believe all that warm and fuzzy stuff, but the message behind the veil is that you will be spending a shocking amount of time here studying, so you may as well be comfortable. Some people apparently take that a tad too literally, and their comfortable activities become a painful burden to others. Hence the request for this short essay on getting along.

Library rules, contrary to popular belief, are not designed by librarians to fulfill their fantasies of domination, but simply to keep the readers away from each other's throats. This is not as easy as it sounds. The Golden Rule is a very simple concept, but try creating a detailed legislative code to put it into practice with a user group composed of students

flexing their newly developed disputation muscles. We do the best we can, but there is no substitute for good manners and a willingness to let bygones be bygones.

In coping with the habits of your fellow readers, it may help to characterize their behavior as negligent rather than malicious. Bear in mind that no one is actually trying to cause you pain, although the regular use of the simile that "the acquisition of knowledge is like driving a hot iron spike through your brain" by a certain member of the faculty may have created that impression. Allow me to introduce you to a vocabulary term I fabricated some years ago: *lupolevolent*, which means "raised by wolves."¹ Once you have mastered its use, you will have a handy polysyllabic code word to describe the behavior of your less civilized peers. You may find some comfort in this.

Now let us move on to some specific sug-

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¹ Classics scholars may blanch at this coinage, but I am perfectly willing to construct for them a false etymology from early Church Latin by way of medieval French. Besides, we work in a profession in which *scienter* is used as a noun, so let us not be pedantic.

gestions for behavior modification. Aside from asking that you not bring farm animals into the Library, and that you limit streaking to such significant milestones as winning the NCAA tournament, there are a few simple rules.

Cell Phones

You all have them, you all use them, and you all hate the other people who have and use them. Much has been written on the psychology of that hatred, but it suffices to say that cell phone use in the Library is guaranteed to put you on the fast track to winning the “most despised” category in the class elections. If you can’t turn it off because you are obsessive-compulsive, place it in vibrate mode. If you forget and it rings, the best you can do is sprint for the exit while murmuring an apology.²

Extended Conversation

This is second only to cell phone use in the potential for making that big vein stand out in the forehead of the person across the table from you. You would think it would be worse than cell phones, because it involves twice as much talking, but apparently people are more irritated by their inability to follow both sides of the conversation. Some communication is inevitable, but if it goes beyond a couple of sentences, take it to the lounge. Besides, you really don’t want the rest

of the student body hearing how lame your pickup lines are.³

Food & Drink

We have a pretty relaxed policy about this. You can have a drink (non-alcoholic, of course) anywhere in the Library if you are using one of those spill-resistant cups that make you feel like a three-year-old having a morning juice break. Food is limited to the lounge area across from the Circulation Desk. The purpose of this rule is to help acquaint you with one of the most important principles of the American system of criminal justice, which is that you won’t get punished if you don’t get caught. This also tends to serve the needs of the other readers, because it encourages the consumption of foods that can be eaten surreptitiously. A Twinkie is silent, but you may as well set off firecrackers if you want to eat Doritos in the Quiet Room.



Let me in closing just add that this is a pretty civilized place, and we hope you all participate in keeping it that way. By way of contrast, consider this sign, posted for many years at the entrance to the main library at the University of Chicago: “Please keep your shoes on – many have been stolen.” Things could be much worse. *GB*

2 This is somewhat like reaching for a Kleenex after you sneeze. People may still recoil in disgust, but you will at least get credit for recognizing that you should have done better.

3 This appears to be a good place to note subtly that the Library is not an appropriate venue for meretricious activities.