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## Excuses, Excuses

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alarm clock and at some time in the middle of the night the electricity..." I now have students who have been up all night in private jets and traveled to exotic places or hobnobbed with famous actors and presidents. One arrived late for a 7 a.m. class because she "was on her way back from L.A. after a nocturnal romance, and the line at the cafeteria was very long." (She needed some coffee after such an all-nighter.) Other students have been involved in helping ALF shop for a new wardrobe.

When the excuses are given orally, they tend not to be too long, but their entertainment and communicative value is tremendous.

### Written Excuses

In composition classes, on the other hand, excuses are to be written and then read to the class. I usually request a one-page minimum. Again, they should be imaginative flights of fantasy. Late compositions, which previously were rarely accepted, are accepted now, but only with an imaginative excuse attached.

No more excuses concerning electric typewriters (it seemed that the only time students decided to type homework compositions was precisely on the day when they knew that there would be a power failure), and I suggest keeping away from domestic crises when coming up

with excuses. The number of students who have outer space aliens and CIA directors intercede on their behalf so that the teacher doesn't give them an absence is surprising.

It might help to dedicate one composition class to writing far-fetched excuses as training for future excuses.

### Results

Students know that no matter how absurd their excuse, it will be accepted, and the more outrageous, the better. However, no excuse may be used more than once.

Excuses, which previously were used only to eliminate the red check marks next to a student's name, are now used as a communicative activity and to practice writing skills, not to mention the stimulation of student creativity.

Of course, when the teacher is late, he, too, has to abide by the rules if he wants the students to excuse his tardiness.

### About the Author

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## Excuses, Excuses, Excuses (A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to English Class)

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Students' excuses, by and large, are rather monothematic. They usually involve illness, transportation and weather.

Being a "mean, classroom taskmaster", I usually interrogate the students as to why they've arrived late, why they weren't in class yesterday, or why they haven't handed in their homework assignment. I feel that as long as students are able to come up with some kind of excuse in English, no matter how limp, they are at least communicating in English. Nevertheless, after hearing countless stories day after day about how slowly the bus driver drove and about the impossibility of catching a taxi on rainy days, or about life-threatening illnesses caught by a student or relative (no matter

how distantly removed), I decided to ask for more creativity in excuses.

### Oral Excuses

In English courses working on oral skills, the students, in order to have an absence excused, would have to create an imaginary tale or excuse to account for their absence or tardiness. The same would hold true for late or missing homework assignments. They would have to tell their tale to the other members of the class. This has sometimes been used as the warm-up activity for a class.

Early morning classes are no longer producing the classic "I have an electric  
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