

“The Essential 55”

by Ron Clark

Rule 1

When responding to any adult, you must answer by saying “Yes ma’am” or “No sir.” Just nodding your head or saying any other form of yes or no is not acceptable.

Rule 2

Make eye contact. When someone is speaking, keep your eyes on him or her at all times. If someone makes a comment, turn and face that person.

Rule 3

If someone in the class wins a game or does something well, we will congratulate that person. Claps should be at least three seconds in length with the full part of both hands meeting in a manner that will give the appropriate clap volume.

Rule 4

During discussions, respect other students’ comments, opinions, and ideas. When possible, make statements like, “I agree with John, and I also feel that...” or “I disagree with Sarah. She made a good point I feel that...” or “I think Victor made an excellent observation, and it made me realize...”

Rule 5

If you win or do well at something, do not brag. If you lose, do not show anger. Instead, say something like, “I really enjoyed the competition, and I look forward to playing you again,” or “good game,” or don’t say anything at all. To show anger or sarcasm, such as “I wasn’t playing hard anyway” or “You really aren’t that good,” shows weakness.

Rule 6

If you are asked a question in conversation, you should ask a question in return.

Me: "Did you have a nice weekend?"

You: "Yes, I had a great time. My family and I went shopping. What about you? Did you have a nice weekend?"

It is only polite to show others that you are just as interested in them as they are in you.

Rule 7

"When you cough or sneeze or burp, it is appropriate to turn your head away from others and cover your mouth with the full part of your hand. Using a fist is not acceptable. Afterward, you should say, "Excuse me."

Rule 8

"Do not smack your lips, tsk, roll your eyes, or show disrespect with gestures."

Rule 9

"Always say thank you when I give you something. If you do not say it within 3 seconds after receiving the item, I will take it back. There is no excuse for not showing appreciation."

Rule 10

"When you are given something from someone, never insult that person by making negative comments about the gift or by insinuating that it wasn't appreciated"

Rule 11

"Surprise others by performing random acts of kindness. Go out of your way to do something surprisingly kind and generous for someone at least once a month."

Rule 12

“Occasionally we may grade each other’s papers as a group. When grading other students’ papers, if you give someone an incorrect grade, whether it is higher or lower than they deserve, the amount the grade differs from the actual grade will be deducted from your paper. The only marks you are allowed to make on others’ papers are an “X” and the number they got incorrect.”

Rule 13

“When we read together in class, you must follow along. If I call on you to read, you must know exactly where we are and begin to read immediately”

Rule 14

“Answer all questions with a complete sentence. For example, if the question asks, “What is the capital of Russia?” you should respond by writing, “The capital of Russia is Moscow.” Also, in conversation with others, it is important to use complete sentences out of respect for the person’s question. For example, if a person asks, “How are you?” instead of just responding by saying, “Fine,” you should say, “I’m doing fine, thank you. How about yourself?”

Rule 15

“At times throughout the year, I will give rewards for good behavior, academic performances and other acts worthy of praise. If you ever ask me for a reward, however, it will not be given. It is rude to ask if you are getting something for good behavior. You should be good and try your best because you are trying to better yourself, not because you are anticipating a reward. I usually give some sort of reward to everyone who scores 100 on unit tests. If you make 100 and ask if you are getting something, no one who made 100 will be given anything.”

Rule 16

“Homework will be turned in each day for each subject by every student with no exceptions.”

Rule 17

“When we are in transition from one subject to the other, the change will be swift, quiet and orderly. We should be consistently able to turn from one book to another, complete with all homework and necessary materials, as quickly as possible. The opportune amount of time to spend in transition should be less than ten seconds, and we will work toward a goal of seven seconds.”

Rule 18

“You will make every effort to be as organized as possible.”

Rule 19

“When I assign homework, there is to be no moaning or complaining. This will result in a doubled assignment.”

Rule 20

“While you are with a substitute teacher, you will obey the same rules that you follow when I am with you. (I know this is hard, but it is important.)”

Rule 21

“We will follow certain classroom protocols. We will be organized, efficient, and on task. In order to do so, we will follow these rules:

1. Do not get out of your seat without permission. Exception: If you are sick, leave immediately.

2. Do not speak unless:

You raise your hand, and I call on you.

I ask you a question and you are responding.

It is a recess or lunch.

I instruct you otherwise (for example, during group work).”

Rule 22

“You may bring a bottle of water and leave it on your desk. Do not ask me if you can get water while I am teaching a lesson. You can even have food at your desk as long as others don’t

see it and I don't hear you eat it."

Rule 23

"Quickly learn the name of other teachers in the school and greet them by saying things like, "Good morning Mrs. Graham," or "Good afternoon Ms. Ortiz. That is a very pretty dress." (Note: If you are in line with the rest of class, you are not allowed to speak to the teachers at that time because the no-talking rule is in effect. You should speak to other teachers if you are entering or leaving the school, on recess, on an errand, or changing classes.)

Rule 24

"Flush the toilet and wash your hands after using the rest room. When in a public rest room, get a paper towel before washing your hands. After washing your hands, use the paper towel to turn off the faucets and to press the dispenser to get another paper towel to dry your hands. (Or use the towel to press the button to start the dryer.) The last thing you want to do is touch areas with clean hands that others have touched with dirty hands."

Rule 25

"We will often have visitors to our school. If someone is coming to visit our class, I will send two students to the front door of the building. You will have a sign welcoming the person. When our visitor arrives, you will shake hands, tell him or her who you are, and welcome the person to our school. You will then take the visitor on a small tour of the building before bringing him or her to the classroom."

Rule 26

"Do not save seats in the lunchroom. If someone wants to sit down, let him or her. Do not try to exclude anyone. We are a family, and we must treat one another with respect and kindness."

Rule 27

“If I or any other teacher in school is speaking to or disciplining a student, do not look at that student. You wouldn’t want others looking at you if you were in trouble or being reprimanded, so don’t look at others in that situation. If you are the student I am talking to, do not get angry or fuss at students who are looking at you. Let me know and I will handle the situation.”

Rule 28

"If you have a question about your homework, you may call me. If I am not there to answer the phone, please leave a message in the following manner: "Hi, Mr. Clark, this is _____ . I need help with the _____ homework. You can call me back until ____:00. Thank you." There is no need to leave this message fourteen times."

Rule 29

“There are several manners dealing with food that you must follow: I call these my ABC’s of Etiquette.

- A. When you first sit down for a meal, immediately place your napkin in your lap. If your silverware is wrapped in a napkin, unwrap it as soon as you sit down and place the napkin in your lap.
- B. When you are finished eating, place your napkin on the table to the left of your plate. Place it loosely beside the plate. Don’t crumple it, because you don’t want to seem untidy. Don’t fold it too neatly, because you don’t want the restaurant to think you assume they are going to use it again. Never leave your napkin on your chair. This implies that the napkin is too dirty to be left on the table. Also, in some cultures, leaving the napkin on the chair is known as a way to say that you don’t intend to return to the restaurant again.
- C. Never place your elbows on the table.
- D. Use one hand to eat, unless you are cutting or buttering food. Never have your fork in one hand and a glass in the other.
- E. Do not lick your fingers. There is a napkin provided for the purpose of cleaning your fingers. There is no need to lick yourself clean.

- F. Do not smack your lips or chew noisily.
- G. Do not chew with your mouth open.
- H. Do not talk with your mouth full. Sometimes people will place a hand over their mouth and talk anyway. Don't do that. Wait until you have swallowed your food to speak.
- I. If something is caught in your teeth, don't go in after it; wait until you are in the rest room to remove it.
- J. Do not slurp.
- K. Do not play with your food.
- L. If you drop your fork, napkin, or anything else on the floor, DO NOT pick it up. It is very rude and unsanitary to place something on the table that has been on the floor. If you pick up something that has dropped and hand it to a waiter, then you will need to excuse yourself and wash your hands before continuing with your meal. The best way to handle a situation when something has dropped on the floor is to ask a waiter for a replacement; leave the old one on the floor.
- M. You are to use your utensils for eating almost everything. Here are ten types of food you may use your hands to eat:
 - 1. Pizza
 - 2. Bacon
 - 3. Cookies
 - 4. Bread (Always tear off a bite-sized piece to eat. If you are going to use butter, never butter the whole piece of bread; butter the piece you tore off, and eat that before tearing another piece.)
 - 5. Corn on the cob (It is appropriate to eat across instead of eating around.)
 - 6. Hot dogs, hamburgers, and sandwiches (including breakfast biscuits)
 - 7. French fries and chips
 - 8. Fried chicken
 - 9. Asparagus (yes, asparagus)
 - 10. Small fruits (like grapes on a stem), apples, oranges, carrots, etc.
- N. Never reach over someone's plate to get something. You should say, "Will you please pass the salt?"
- O. Never start eating off of your tray until you are at your seat.
- P. When we are eating at a restaurant, you are not to begin eating until everyone at the table has received food.

- Q. You should never complain if the line is too long, the food isn't good, or if there is a wait. You don't want to be negative to the point where you spoil the enjoyment of the event for others.
- R. If you are unsure which silverware to use, simply start with the fork, knife or spoon that is the farthest from your plate. On the left, you will have your salad fork on the outside and your dinner fork on the inside. On the far right, you will have your soup spoon. Beside it you will have the spoon you will use to stir your coffee or tea, then your salad knife, and then your dinner knife. The utensils above your plate are to be used for dessert.
- S. When you are finished eating, do not push your plate away from you. Leave it where it is in the setting. If you want to show you have finished eating, you should lay your fork and knife together diagonally across the plate. You should place the fork with the tines down, and you should have the sharp side of the knife facing down. Of the two utensils, the fork should be closest to you.
- T. Never place a piece of silverware that you have used back on the table. Leave it on a plate or saucer.
- U. If you didn't use a utensil, do not place it on a plate or saucer when you are finished. Just leave it where it is.
- V. Always look a waiter in the eyes when you are ordering, asking a question, or saying thank you.
- W. Make a point to remember the waiter's name when he introduces himself to you. Use his name as often as possible throughout the course of the meal.
- X. If you have to go to the rest room, you should stand up and say, "Excuse me," as you leave the table.
- Y. When you are offered desserts or asked a question such as "What sides would you like?" or "What dressing would you like for your salad?" it is best to ask, "What are my options?" That way, you aren't going through a process of naming things the restaurant might not have.
- Z. Never talk to waiters or waitresses as if they are servants. Treat them with respect and kindness, and remember, they are the ones who are fixing food and bringing it to you. You do not want to be on the bad side of a waiter."

Rule 30

"After we eat, we will clean up after ourselves. This includes cleaning off the tables and making sure we haven't left any trash on the floor or around the eating area. It is important to be responsible for your trash no matter where you are and to be sure not to litter."

Rule 31

"When we stay in a hotel room, it is appropriate to leave a tip on the pillow for the hotel workers who are responsible for cleaning the room after our stay. Two to three dollars per night is an appropriate amount, depending on the cost of the room."

Rule 32

"When we ride on a bus, we will always sit facing forward. We will never turn around to talk to other students, stick anything out of the windows, or get out of our seats. When we exit the bus, we will always thank the bus driver and tell him to have a good day."

Rule 33

"When we go on field trips, we will meet different people. When I introduce you to people, make sure that you remember their names. Then, when we are leaving, make sure to shake their hands and thank them, mentioning their names as you do so."

Rule 34

"Whenever you are offered food, whether it be on a buffet or treats in class, never take more than your fair share. You never want to be greedy and try to get more than you should, not only because it is wasteful, but also because it is disrespectful to others when you do not leave enough for them."

Rule 35

"Whether we are in school or on a field trip, if someone drops something, pick it up and hand it back to them. Even if they are closer to the object, it is only polite to make the gesture of

bending down to retrieve the item."

Rule 36

"If you approach a door and someone is following you, hold the door. If the door opens by pulling, pull it open, stand to the side, and allow the other person to pass through it first, then you can walk through. If the door opens by pushing, hold the door open after you push through."

Rule 37

"If we are on a field trip, it is a good idea to compliment something about the place where you are visiting. For example, if we visit someone's home, it would be a nice gesture to tell them that you think they have nice curtains. People are always self-conscious when they have guests visit their home, so you want to make them feel at ease. Also, if we are visiting other places, such as a museum or theater, it would be nice to comment on how beautiful the architecture is or to tell the guide that you think the facility is very nice."

Rule 38

"During an assembly do not speak and do not look around and try to get the attention of your friends in other classes. We must uphold an image that shows we have our act together."

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Rule 41

“When you answer the phone at your house, you must do so in an appropriate manner.”

Rule 42

“When we return from a trip, you will shake my hand as well as the hands of every chaperone. You will thank us for taking the time to take you on the trip, and you will let us know that you appreciate having the opportunity to go. I am not concerned with being thanked; I am concerned with teaching you that is it appropriate to show appreciation when someone has gone out of his or her way to help you.

Rule 43

“When we are on field trips and we have to go up escalators, we will stand to the right. That will give other individuals who are in a hurry the option of walking up the left-hand side of the escalator. When we are going to enter an elevator, the subway, or a doorway, we will wait for others to exit before we enter.”

Rule 44

“When in a line; walk single file, two to three feet behind the person in front of you with your arms at your sides. You should face forward at all times. There will be absolutely no talking.”

Rule 45

“Never cut line. If someone cuts in front of you, do not say or do anything about it. Let it happen, but let me know about it. I will handle the situation. If you fuss with someone who has cut in line, you could get in trouble as well. It’s not worth it; just let me know what happened. Please handle all disputes with

other classmates in the same manner, by coming to me with any problems before you take matters into your own hands."

Rule 46

"When we go to a movie theater

Rule 47

"Do not bring Doritos in the school building."

Rule 48

"If any child in this school is bothering you, let me know. I am your teacher, and I am here to look after you and protect you. I am not going to let anyone in this school bully you or make you feel uncomfortable. In return, I ask that you not take matters into your own hands; let me deal with the student."

Rule 49

"Stand up for what you believe in. You shouldn't take no for an answer if your heart and mind are leading you in a direction that you feel strongly about."

Rule 50

"Be positive and enjoy life. Some things just aren't worth getting upset over. Keep everything in perspective and focus on the good in your life."

Rule 51

"Live so that you will never have regrets. If there is something you want to do, do it! Never let fear, doubt, or other obstacles stand in your way. If there is something you want, fight for it with all of your heart. If there is something you want to do, go for it and don't stop until you make it happen. If there is something you want to be, do whatever is necessary in order to live that dream."

Rule 52

"Accept that you are going to make mistakes. Learn from them and move on."

Rule 53

“No matter what the circumstances, always be honest. Even if you have done something wrong, it is best to admit it to me, because I will respect that, and oftentimes I will forget any disciplinary measures because of your honesty.”

Rule 54

“Carpe Diem. You only live today once, so don’t waste it. Life is made up of special moments, many of which happen when caution is thrown to the wind and people take action and seize the day.”

Rule 55

“Be the best person you can be.”

