



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E1

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Hassan's Attendance Problem

By Sudha Murty

For many years now, I have been teaching Computer Science to students studying for their Master's in Computer Applications at a college in Bangalore. I have interacted with many students and though it is not possible to remember all of them now, the memories of some are etched in my mind. That is not because they were all brilliant, but something in them was very different from the others.

In my first batch, there was a very bright boy called Hassan. He was tall, handsome with a very good memory. He came from an affluent family where he was the only son. Initially, I did not come to know of his existence at all, mainly because he was hardly ever present. I normally take the first class of the day, which is scheduled at 9 a.m. or the one after that at 10 a.m. I prefer this time as this is when students are fresh and very attentive.

Once in a while Hassan would turn up, particularly if there was a class test or during examinations.

I met him more often for attendance shortage meetings. He would beg for attendance in such a manner that it was very difficult for me to say 'no'.

Sometimes I would get upset and tell him, 'No, I can't give you attendance. There should be discipline.'

'Yes Madam,' he would reply apologetically, 'pardon me. From the next semester onwards, I will definitely attend your class. Can you not pardon me this time? To err is human, to forgive is divine. You have only taught us this.'

I could not remain angry for long. Teachers get upset with students who are not regular, but if the attendance shortage affects their appearance in the final examination, one tends to melt like snow against the sun. A good teacher will always wish for the best for their student, though I do agree discipline is very important too.

As he was very bright, Hassan would invariably get a first class in the exam. However, before the exams started, every semester this drama with Hassan would be repeated. I would get upset, threaten and ultimately give in. Each time Hassan would promise to improve his attendance record, and for one week would attend all classes, and then the same old story would follow. Each time he had a different reason for his absences. Unfortunately, they

always seemed genuine to me.

Once I got tired of his stories and called his parents.

‘Your son is a bright boy, he is not arrogant but he lacks discipline. If only he came to class regularly and attended the lab I am sure he can get a rank. I have failed to convince him. I will be happy if you could look into the matter more seriously because this is going to affect his life,’ I said to them.

Hassan’s father was busy and did not take my words very seriously. He said, ‘As long as he does well, that is fine with me because children do not listen to their parents after a certain age. Only life will teach them.’

But his mother was in tears.

‘Madam, I have failed as a mother. He does not listen to me at all. He spends all night listening to music and chatting with his friends. He sleeps at six in the morning. How can he come to any class? He does not pay any attention to what I say and tells me I repeat the same thing always.’

The meeting ended in an argument between his parents. His father said, ‘You are the mother. It is your duty to correct him. You spend more time with him. I am so busy. You have failed.’

His mother said, ‘You are the father. It is difficult to control boys. You can speak to him man to man. Earning money is not the only thing in life.’

This continued for a while and the meeting ended fruitlessly. Hassan continued in his ways till he passed out of his course, as usual in first class. He was a nice boy. He came and thanked me.

‘Madam, thank you for teaching me for the last three years. Because of your kind heart, I could get all my attendance. I wish all teachers were like you in the college.’

I laughed.

‘God willing, we will meet again.’

But I did not meet Hassan for a long time and forgot all about him. Years passed. I taught many students. Some of them became very good human

beings, some became famous, some became rich and some remained ordinary. As far as I was concerned, they were like my children. Some remember me still and send invitations to weddings, naming ceremonies, house warmings, etc. If I am in town, I definitely try and attend, because for me their immense love is my strength.

One Monday morning, my secretary told me a person wanting to sell the latest software in high school teaching wanted to meet me. I was extremely busy and the piles of unanswered letters were looking at me accusingly. I had no time to talk to a salesperson. So I told her, 'He can meet someone else. I don't have time.'

But my secretary said he was insisting he wanted to meet only me and that he was my student. She knew how fond I was of all my students, so she had been unable to say 'no' to him.

'In that case, let him see me at 2 p.m.'

In the afternoon, a man of about thirty-five years, plump, with a bald head and moderately dressed was waiting for me in the office. In his hand was the CD with the software. I could not place him though he seemed familiar. He smiled at me and said, 'Madam, can you recognize me? You may not, because how can you remember all your students? From a window, you can see the outside world but from the outside, you cannot see all that is inside.'

I liked his analogy and was sure he was my student because I often used this phrase in my class. Still, I could not guess who he was.

'Madam, I was the perpetual latecomer of your class.'
That's when the coin dropped. 'Hi, Hassan. How are you? It's been a long time since I last met you.' I was very happy to see him.

'Madam, I am fine and remember many of your lessons.'

'Is it Database Management? Or C? Or Pascal?'

'None of the software Madam, I remember the moral lessons.'
I didn't know what moral lessons I had taught, though I do tell some stories during my lectures on computer software.

‘Hassan, what are you doing now?’ Now his face became a little pale.

‘Madam, I am selling this software which is useful in teaching maths, physics and chemistry. It is of help to both teachers and students. I know your foundation helps a lot in education at the high school level. I thought it may be of some interest to you.’

‘Hassan, what did you do for so many years?’

I knew all his classmates by this time were in very high positions in the software industry. Hassan being a bright student, should have definitely done well. Yet, on the contrary, he seemed to be doing a small job of selling high school software door-to-door.

‘Madam, you know I was very irregular in college. The same habit continued even after my graduation. I would get up late and be very lazy. My mother would lose her temper and peace of mind. I did not bother. I took her for granted. After a lot of pressure from my parents, I took up a job. But I continued with the same habits of going late to the office, not keeping appointments and not being responsible. I did not have the proper knowledge also. In college, I hardly studied. Getting a first class in the examination is not an indication of the amount of knowledge one has. I would study just before the exams, guess the probable questions, and skip the chapters. I always thought I could somehow make it later. But without proper knowledge, it is difficult to work. I always laughed at those people who were hard workers. I used to make fun of them and called them “nerds”. Today those “nerds” have become millionaires. Nobody liked me in my office because of my behaviour. No employer would keep such an employee, and I lost whatever job I took up. In my frustration, I started quarrelling at the office as well as at home. Finally, my father got so fed up that he told me to live separately. He always gave me a lot of freedom but I never picked up any good habits. My state today is the result of my own habits.’

I felt sorry for Hassan, who with all his intelligence and good nature, could not make it.

‘Hassan, you knew your faults, you could have improved and made a better life for yourself. There is always a start at any age. Don’t get disappointed. You may have lost a battle but you can still win the war.’

'Madam, old habits die hard.'

'But Hassan it is possible to change your habits. There is nothing which is impossible. You only require willpower. You are yourself not aware of all your potential. Please remember when elders say something they do so because they want you to lead a better life than them. Excellence does not come by accident but by practice.'

I could see a twinkle in his eyes. I thought I saw a glimpse of the young bright Hassan. 'I will try my best, Madam,' he promised, as he rose to leave.

I have not met Hassan since that day. I hope to bump into him unexpectedly once again, and this time find him happy and successful.

Summary

Hassan was a student in a college in Bangalore, studying for his Master's degree in Computer Application. He had a very good memory and was quite tall and attractive. He had erratic attendance at the college. He was always short of attendance.

He did not put much effort into his college work. He made sure to study for several critical questions, and as a result, he came out on top in his class. Despite being cautioned by both his teacher and his parents to maintain punctuality and consistency in his college studies, he did not bother. He had a low impression of the other students in his class who put in a lot of effort.

After graduation, his classmates found satisfying employment. They achieved fame and fortune as a result.

Yet Hassan exhibited his typical lazy behaviour. He found employment at one or more locations. But, due to his lack of commitment, he lost all of them. His father advised him to work independently. He eventually found success in the computer software sales industry.

One day, he came face to face with the storyteller. She was taken aback to see him working in such a menial capacity. She counselled him to overcome his slothfulness, put in long hours of effort, and strive for advancement in his career. He gave his word that he would take her counsel and work towards becoming a more upstanding citizen.

The purpose of education is to prepare people for life, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to contribute to a thriving society.

If the students are achieving high grades in exams without actually understanding the subject they study. They may have a very good short-term memory.

Something is wrong with the examination system! Exams ought not to be just testing students' capacity to remember facts.

Questions and answers

1. What was the narrator's profession?

Answer. The narrator served as a computer science teacher at a college in Bangalore.

2. Why was Hassan not noticed by the teacher in the class?

Answer. Hassan was rarely present in the class, so the teacher did not notice him.

3. Why would the narrator give attendance to Hassan every time?

Answer. He would beg to be there in such a way that the narrator could not say no.

4. Why were Hassan's parents called to school?

Answer. They were called to let them know about Hassan's irregular attendance and lack of discipline.

5. During which days would Hassan often show up in the class?

Answer. He would often show up when there was a class test or an exam.

6. What was Hassan's mother's plea to his father?

Answer. Hassan's mother told his father that he should talk to him in a firm way.

7. Why did parent-teacher meeting end fruitlessly?

Answer. The parent-teacher meeting ended fruitlessly because they could not decide how to correct Hassan.

8. Describe the physical appearance of Hassan when he met his teacher after several years?

Answer. Hassan was 35 years old, fat, bald, and not well dressed.

9. What had the narrator expected Hassan to become in his life?

Answer. The narrator had hoped that Hassan would do well in life because he was smart in his class.

10. How did Hassan study when he was in his college?

Answer. He didn't go to college very often, but he was first in his class on the exam. By thinking of some likely questions and he had a good memory.

11. According to Hassan, who were the nerds?

Answer. According to Hassan, the hard-working students were nerds.

12. Why did Hassan start living separately?

Answer. He often quarrelled at home and with his employers.

13. What made Hassan feel optimistic when he left the narrator's office?

Answer. He felt hopeful when his teacher told him that he could change his habits and work hard to lead a better life.

4. Grammar Page

1 Nouns

There are two main types of nouns: **common nouns** and **proper nouns**.

Common Nouns

Words for people, places and things are called **common nouns**.

These common nouns are words for **things**.

ruler	chair	hammer	bicycle	truth
pen	table	saw	ship	calculator
crayons	sofa	axe	truck	television
pencil	loyalty	drill	ferry	fridge
book	lamp	ladder	train	cooker
dictionary	carpet	lawnmower	bus	computer
courage	telephone	spade	laziness	printer

These common nouns are words for **animals**. Notice that special names for **young animals** are included.

animal	its young	animal	its young
dog	puppy	fox	cub
cat	kitten	elephant	calf
cow	calf	kangaroo	joey
horse	foal	bear	cub
sheep	lamb	lion	cub
goat	kid	tiger	cub
frog	tadpole	whale	calf

These common nouns are words for **places**.

bank	airport	school	post office
hotel	gas station	university	police station
library	park	office	restaurant
museum	farm	mosque	supermarket
mall	zoo	temple	stadium
theater	factory	shop	synagogue
hospital	nursery	gym	church

Nouns: Proper Nouns

These common nouns are words for **people** who do certain things.

singer	manager	sailor	gardener
dancer	secretary	pilot	police officer
artist	teacher	driver	plumber
photographer	doctor	writer	farmer
magician	dentist	friend	clerk
athlete	lawyer	brother	technician

Proper Nouns

The names of particular people, places and things are **proper nouns**. They always **begin with a capital letter**.

These **people's names** are proper nouns.

Robin Hood	Florence Nightingale	Mom	Miss Park
Aladdin	Muhammad Ali	Dad	Mrs. Taylor
Frankenstein	George Washington	Granny	Mr. Young
Harry Potter	David Beckham	Grandad	Dr. Lee
Santa Claus	Julia Roberts	Uncle David	Professor Raj
Mahatma Gandhi	Nelson Mandela	Aunt Diana	Jose
Confucius	Alex Rodriguez	Ms. Hall	Yang Ming

The names of the **days of the week** and the **months of the year** are proper nouns.

days of the week

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday
Sunday

months

January
February
March
April
May
June
July
August
September
October
November
December



The names of **special days and celebrations** are also proper nouns.

New Year's Day	Veterans' Day
Mother's Day	Thanksgiving
Independence Day	Memorial Day
Valentine's Day	Halloween
Labor Day	Christmas
Ramadan	Yom Kippur

The names of **famous places, buildings and monuments** are proper nouns.

Big Ben	the Empire State Building
the Sphinx	the Taj Mahal
Graceland	the Eiffel Tower
the Grand Canyon	the Golden Gate Bridge
the Sydney Opera House	the Great Wall of China
Buckingham Palace	Chaco Canyon Pueblo
the Leaning Tower of Pisa	the Statue of Liberty

The names of **people who live in a particular country** are also proper nouns.

country	people	country	people
Afghanistan	Afghans	Samoa	Samoans
Australia	Australians	New Zealand	New Zealanders
Britain	the British	Pakistan	Pakistanis
China	the Chinese	the Philippines	Filipinos
France	the French	Russia	Russians
Germany	Germans	Nicaragua	Nicaraguans
India	Indians	South Africa	South Africans
Indonesia	Indonesians	Spain	Spaniards
Italy	Italians	Switzerland	the Swiss
Japan	the Japanese	Thailand	Thais
Korea	Koreans	USA	Americans
Malaysia	Malaysians	Vietnam	the Vietnamese