

## Insubordination – What Is It?

*Insubordination is the willful disobedience of a lawful directive of a person with legitimate authority. Let's break that down.*

**Willful disobedience** means you have to decide not to comply with an order. That can get sticky. Some administrators will charge insubordination if you refuse to get your grades in before the deadline, or if you continue an argument with him after he has told you to return to work and talk about this at another time. Be very careful what you put in emails to administrators. Some have been used to prove insubordination.

**Lawful directive** means it is related to your job duties. If you are a teacher and the principal directs you to attend a meeting after school, and you do not show up, you could be charged with insubordination. If you are a school secretary and you are directed to call a parent and tell him/her that his/her child is being disciplined, you could argue that this procedure is outside your duty as a secretary. However, if you are told to do something by a supervisor, it is best to do what you are told and file a grievance later than it is to risk insubordination by refusing an order.

**Legitimate authority** is, of course, your immediate supervisor and all those above that level. Most often it is your onsite supervisor or principal who directs you to do something, but if someone of higher ranking, an area superintendent or supervisor, directs you to do something, you do not have the option to refuse.

***So what can happen?*** Even though it is an offense that can lead to termination, most often it does not reach that serious state. Usually, the supervisor will discuss the situation and the employee will comply with a reasonable directive. However, some employees have been suspended without pay as a consequence of not obeying an order, and sometimes insubordination is one of the reasons cited for an employee's termination.

***What do you do?*** Be aware of all conversations with your supervisor that are work-related. Follow directives. Written directives take on even more importance, since they can be used as documentation that a directive was given. If you are not sure that you can follow a directive, discuss options with your principal or supervisor, but be sure to follow the option to which you agreed. You should not be asked to risk health or safety. If you have the time to get advice, call your UniServ Director. You will get an answer based on North Carolina law and school board policy. It's better to calm down, ask questions, and be sure before you comply than it is to willingly disobey a directive and risk real trouble.

**When in doubt, obey the order and resolve it after you get NCAE assistance.**



## Is It Insubordination If . . .

(Scenarios)

**Consider the following scenarios and discuss whether they are or are not insubordination.**

- A. An educator refuses to medicate a student
- B. An educator refuses to do bus duty in an unsafe situation
- C. A teacher gets grades in late
- D. An employee is habitually late for work
- E. Teachers are assigned to a workshop two days before a workday. Do you have to attend?
- F. The PTA meeting is required for all teachers. Do you have to attend?

