

4.

Listen to a conversation between a student and a professor.

Student: Professor Dixon? I'm Brenda Pierce. From your Geology 210 class . . . ?

Professor: Yes. I know. That's a big class, but I do recognize you. As a matter of fact, I noticed you weren't in class yesterday morning. Did you oversleep? That's one of the problems with an 8:00 class. I almost overslept myself a couple of times.

Student: Oh, uh, no, I didn't oversleep. In fact, I was up at 5:00—one of my roommates had an early flight and I took her to the airport. I thought I'd make it back here in time, but, uh, well, you know . . . you know how traffic can be out on Airport Road at that time of day. Anyway, uh, I know you were going to tell us . . . give us some information about our research paper in class today. Do you have a few minutes to fill me in?

Professor: Well, umm, a few minutes, I guess. This isn't my regular office hour. I actually just came by my office to pick up a few papers before the faculty meeting.

Student: Okay, well . . . about the research paper . . . how long does it have to be?

Professor: Well, as I told the class, the paper counts for 30% of your grade. It should be at least twelve pages . . . but no more than twenty-five. And your bibliography should contain at least ten reference sources.

Student: Will you be assigning the topic, or . . .

Professor: I'm leaving the choice of topic up to you. Of course, it should be related to something we've discussed in class.

Student: I, I'm interested in writing about earthquakes . . . Professor: Hmm. Earthquakes . . . well, I don't know, Brenda . . . that sounds like much too broad a topic for a short research paper.

Student: Oh, well, I'm planning to choose . . . I plan to get more specific than that. I want to write about using animals to predict earthquakes.

Professor: Really? Well, once scientists wondered if maybe . . . if perhaps there was some connection between strange behavior in animals and earthquakes . . . and that maybe animals... that you could use them to predict earth- quakes. But there have been a lot of studies on this subject, you know, and so far, none of them have shown anything promising . . .

Student: But I thought there was this . . . I saw this show on television about earthquakes, and it said that in, uh, China, I think it was, they did predict an earthquake because of the way animals were acting.

Professor: Oh, right, you're thinking of the Haecheng earth- quake about thirty years ago. Well, that's true. There were snakes coming out of the ground in the middle of winter when they should have been hibernating . . . and supposedly horses and other animals were acting frightened. And there were other signs, too, not just from animals. So the government ordered an evacuation of the area, and in fact, there was an earthquake, so thousands of lives were probably saved.

Student: Yeah, that's what I'm thinking of . . . that's what I saw on television.

Professor: The problem is, that, unfortunately, no one's been able to duplicate that kind of result . . . in China or anywhere. There have been lots of earthquakes since then that haven't been predicted, and there have been a couple of false alarms when cities were evacuated for no reason . . . and like I said, none of the studies that have been done have shown that animals are any better at predicting earth- quakes than people are.

Student: So that's . . . so you don't think that's a very good idea for a topic, then, I suppose . . .

Professor: I didn't say that . . . just because this theory hasn't been proved doesn't mean you couldn't write a perfectly good paper about this topic . . . on the notion that animals can predict earthquakes. Why not? It could be pretty interesting. But to do a good job, you . . . you'll need to look at some serious studies in the scientific journals, not just some pop-science articles in newspapers or . . . and you can't get your information from television shows.

Student: You really think it might make a good paper? Well, then, I think if I can get enough information from the library or the Internet . . .

Professor: Okay, why don't you see what you can find? Oh, I forgot to mention . . . you'll need to write up a formal proposal for your paper, and work up a preliminary bibliography, and hand it in to me a week from tomorrow. I'll need to approve it before you get started. Now, if you'll excuse me, Brenda, I've got to get to that faculty meeting.

TRANSCRIPTS