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Instructor's Name

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Pumping Patron Portraits

Pumping gas is considered a chore to most people, but it can turn into a nightmare if they get stuck behind any of three different types of people. There are many types of people who purchase gasoline, but these three types are easy to spot. All three have an obvious physical appearance that sets them apart from other gas purchasers. Each has a distinctive pumping technique and freely vocalizes his opinion. Finally, each type has a particular way of annoying every other patron at the same location. These three types of people are known as Leisure Lou, Business Betty, and Lawnmower Larry.

The first type of gas purchaser is Leisure Lou. He can be identified immediately by the station wagon with wooden side panels that he drives and a bumper sticker that tells the world that he is retired. His Hawaiian-print shirt captures everyone's attention, along with his Bermuda shorts and black socks with sandals. A fly fisherman's hat completes the ensemble, which is his personal way to display a state of leisure. His pumping technique also sets him apart from the normal crowd. He parks his car at the first pump, preventing the use of the pump in front of him. He always pays for his gas in advance so that the attendant can preset the pump and he will not have to worry about stopping the pump himself. He activates the pump before opening the access door and unscrewing the tank lid. He tucks the hose under his elbow and spills gas on his hip while opening the tank. As Leisure Lou leans against the side of his car, he pumps his gas absent-mindedly, confident that the pump will stop before gas pours onto the ground. He

whistles a melodic tune while pumping his gas, reinforcing his not-a-care-in-the-world attitude. Once the pump stops, he replaces the hose and screws on the tank lid but forgets to close the access door. After pumping his gas, he enters the convenience store, telling everyone the joys of retirement. Leisure Lou can be a tremendous annoyance. He blocks the use of two pumps while he performs a number of time-consuming tasks. First he browses through the store with no intention of making a purchase. Then he washes his car's windshield. Next he visits the restroom to wash his hands and look at the stain on his hip. Finally he walks his dog around the small patches of grass that serve as landscaping.

The second type of gas purchaser is Business Betty. Her physical appearance is also distinctive. She drives an economical imported car that has a lock on the access door in order for her to hide a spare key. She wears closed-toe pumps instead of a flirty sandal. Her skirt and blazer are of a classical line with no frills. Business Betty's pumping technique is equally distinctive. She unscrews the lid to her tank before removing the hose from the pump. She pumps her gas until the tank is nearly full and then slows the flow to prevent the gas from spewing from the tank. Next she turns off the pump and gives the handle a final squeeze to empty the hose. Finally, she replaces the nozzle, seals the tank, and closes the access door as if following written instructions. Now Business Betty's most telltale characteristic is voiced. She announces to the cashier that she must have a legible receipt for her expense-account report while preaching about the economic virtues of owning an import. Finally, she distinguishes herself in a way that annoys anyone that happens to be in the vicinity. She spends more than her fair share of time at the cashier's counter but pays no attention to the amount of her purchase because she plans to pay with a credit card. When the cashier announces the price, Business Betty has to double check the accuracy of the computed sale with her mentally calculated total.

She then asks to borrow a calculator to check the gas mileage that she has received from her last tank. In the end, Business Betty's presence does not go unnoticed, and the other patrons hope they miss her the next time she purchases gas.

The last type of gas purchaser is Lawnmower Larry. He can generally be recognized by the pickup truck that has a dented fender with a red gas can in the bed. He wears a sweat-stained shirt and jeans that sag to his hips. Peeking from the waistband of his jeans is his underwear. He has on a baseball cap to protect his face from the sun, and stuffed in his pocket is a red shop rag. He has a streak of grease across his brow where he has obviously wiped his sweat off with a dirty hand. Lawnmower Larry's pumping technique is also unique. He pays his two dollars in advance but over-pumps the gas by one cent on a consistent basis. He has no change and borrows the needed pennies from the courtesy jar on the cashier's counter. Lawnmower Larry can be distinguished from the other patrons by his use of the English language in short phrases and simple adjectives. He complains about the difficulty he has had trying to get that "damn lawnmower" started, and even when the mower is running, it's "too damn hot" to mow. Lawnmower Larry's annoyances are only two, but they distinctly identify him. First, he leaves sweat on the counter where he has leaned. Second, he always returns later in the day for more gas and repeats his earlier routine. While sympathetic to his plight, the normal patrons do not miss Lawnmower Larry when he has gone.

These three types of patrons can add more frustration to the life of the average patron than the price of gasoline. While somewhat humorous, these three could test the patience of a saint. Most people can identify with one or two characteristics of each type, but these are extreme characters. Any patron who avoids being in line behind Leisure Lou, Business Betty, or Lawnmower Larry should feel lucky.