

Is Education a "pastime" or a "way of life"?

Post by "Bryan" of May 30, 2026 at 2:12 PM

Epicurus encouraged the avoidance of paideia, but this clearly did not mean the avoidance of "learning in general." He expected people to read, understand grammar, grasp the basics of physics, and think carefully about epistemology. He accepts all useful learning, but rejects becoming a "professional" in any one field.

"Both those around Epicurus and those around Pyrrho seem more commonly inclined to the opposition toward those from the professions. Those around Epicurus [oppose the professions, on the grounds] that the professions contribute nothing to the perfection of wisdom "

Sextus Empiricus (fl.c. 200 CE), Against the Grammarians, 1-3

It seems that Epicurus even wrote a letter giving advice to people who were caught in a profession.

"Seneca to his Lucilius, greetings.

You now understand that you must be led out of those flashy and harmful occupations, but you ask how you might achieve that... so look around for this - if you see this, grab it with full force and all your strength: strive to strip yourself from those duties... Read the letter of Epicurus that pertains to this very issue, the one addressed to Idomeneus, whom Epicurus urges to flee as much as he can and to hurry, before some greater force intervenes and takes away the freedom to withdraw.

He nevertheless adds that nothing should be attempted unless it can be done suitably and at the right time. But when that long-awaited time finally comes, he says one must leap out. He forbids the one thinking about flight to fall asleep, and he hopes for a saving exit even from the most difficult things, if only we do not rush before the right time, nor delay at the right time."

Seneca (fl. 35 CE), Letters to Lucilius, Letter 22, sections 1-5