

5 Quick Classroom-Management Tips for Novice Teachers

I have to admit that I made my share of first year teaching blunders and I often wish I could re-do those early years of teaching.

Once I had an opportunity to learn from mentors, my classroom management was much more effective, allowing for more student engagement and learning.

If you are struggling with discipline, here are five tips that you can start using right away:

#1 Use a normal, natural voice

Are you teaching in your normal voice? Every teacher can remember this from the first year in the classroom: spending those first months talking at an above-normal range until one day, you lose your voice.

Raising our voice to get students' attention is not the best approach, and the stress it causes and the vibe it puts in the room just isn't worth it. The students will mirror your voice level, so avoid using that semi-shouting voice. If we want kids to talk at a normal, pleasant volume, we must do the same.

You want to also differentiate your tone. If you are asking students to put away their notebooks and get into their groups, be sure to use a declarative, matter-of-fact tone. If you are asking a question about a character in a short story, or about contributions made by the Roman Empire, use an inviting, conversational tone.

#2 Speak only when students are quiet and ready

This golden nugget was given to me by a 20-year veteran my first year. She told me that I should just wait and then wait some more until all students were quiet.

So I tried it; I fought the temptation to talk. Sometimes I'd wait much longer than I thought I could hold out for. Slowly but surely, the students would cue each other: "sshh, she's trying to tell us something," "come on, stop talking," and "hey guys, be quiet." (They did all the work for me!)

My patience paid off. Yours will too. And you'll get to keep your voice.

#3 Use hand signals and other non-verbal communication

Holding one hand in the air, and making eye contact with students is a great way to quiet the class and get their attention on you. It takes awhile for students to get used to this as a routine, but it works wonderfully. Have them raise their hand along with you until all are up. Then lower yours and talk.

Flicking the lights off and on once to get the attention is an oldie but goodie. It could also be something you do routinely to let them know they have three minutes to finish an assignment or clean up, etc.

With younger students, try clapping your hands three times and teaching the children to quickly clap back twice. This is a fun and active way to get their attention and all eyes on you.

#4 Address behavior issues quickly and wisely

Be sure to address an issue between you and a student or between two students as quickly as possible. Bad feelings -- on your part or the students -- can so quickly grow from molehills into mountains.

Now, for handling those conflicts wisely, you and the student should step away from the other students, just in the doorway of the classroom perhaps. Wait until after instruction if possible, avoiding interruption of the lesson. Ask naive questions such as, "How might I help you?" Don't accuse the child of anything. Act as if you do care, even if you have the opposite feeling at that moment. The student will usually become disarmed because she might be expecting you to be angry and confrontational.

And, if you must address bad behavior during your instruction, always take a positive approach. Say, "It looks like you have a question" rather than, "Why are you off task and talking?"

When students have conflicts with each other, arrange for the students to meet with you at lunch, after or before school. Use neutral language as you act as a mediator, helping them resolve the problem peacefully, or at least reach an agreeable truce.

#5 Always have a well-designed, engaging lesson

This tip is most important of all. Perhaps you've heard the saying, if you don't have a plan for them, they'll have one for you. *Always overplan.* It's better to run out of time than to run short on a lesson.

From my own first-hand experience and after many classrooms observations, something that I know for sure: Bored students equal trouble! If the lesson is poorly planned, there is often way too much talking and telling from the teacher and not enough hands-on learning and discovery by the students. We all know engaging lessons take both serious mind and time to plan. And they are certainly worth it -- for many reasons.

Share with us your classroom management experiences: What specific challenges are you having? What strategies have worked well for you and your students? Please share in the comment section below.

This list of management techniques was originally published by Edutopia in March of 2012.

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