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## The 5 Priorities of Classroom Management

By Ben Johnson

For beginning teachers, or for teachers like myself returning to teaching, the most difficult thing to master is classroom management. I had to relearn what ten years of hard instruction had taught me: Good classroom management is more than just being strict or authoritarian, and it is more than simply being organized. If I want to have my classroom run smoothly as a well-oiled learning machine, I have to set up a structured learning environment in which certain behaviors are promoted and others are discouraged. I have discovered that there are five components of effective classroom management that establish structures strong enough to entice and motivate student learning:

1. Developing effective working relationships with students
2. Training students on how learning takes place in your classroom
3. Protecting and leveraging time
4. Anticipating student behaviors in well-written lesson plans
5. Establishing standards of behavior that promote student learning

### 1. Develop Effective Working Relationships with Your Students

The most important component of classroom management is relationships. The relationships with my students start at the door when I shake their hand and greet them with a smile (regardless of what misbehaviors might have happened the day before). Those relationships are strengthened, for example, when I use a student's name and actively praise him or her. Those relationships are solidified when I spend individual time with each student to get to know them and then use that knowledge to create personal learning opportunities. From the professional development program, *Capturing Kids' Hearts*, there was one takeaway that benefited me the most: If I have a good relationship with my students, I can push them harder and further to learn because they trust me.

### 2. Train Your Students on How Learning Takes Place in Your Classroom

Your students need to know that you do not expect them to instantly learn, that everyone has an individual process for learning, and that if they follow your guidance, they will be successful in learning. This is more than just talking about your homework policy, late work, and absences. It is revealing to your students how you are going to create -- with them -- a highly effective, low-maintenance, learning team. For example, I discuss with my students that the true power of a strategy such as **Cornell Notes** is not dividing the paper in two parts. The benefit of that strategy comes from writing the questions on the left side of the paper while reviewing their notes, and then taking the time to summarize what they learned. You have a learning philosophy that guides your teaching style; teach it to your students. Clearly map out for your students what you do to help them learn so that when you do it, they know what you are doing and why and they will be more willing to help.

### 3. Protect and Leverage Your Time

An effective classroom manager must be prepared with materials and know how to transition students from one activity to another without wasting time. The number one thing we could do to increase our students' academic performance is to increase the time spent on learning. Time is chipped away by taking attendance, announcements, and summons to the office, restroom breaks, pep rally schedules, class meetings, special presentations, awards ceremonies, celebrations, and a myriad of other things. Some disruptions and time stealers we cannot avoid, but being successful at managing the classroom also includes managing the time, protecting it, and leveraging it to your best advantage. In ***Teach Like a Champion***, author Doug Lemov effectively demonstrates how to use routines to minimize lost time in activities like handing out papers; he also demonstrates routines to help students train their minds to adopt useful habits and skills, like being able to quickly answer and ask questions.

### 4. Anticipate Your Students' Behaviors in Well-Written Lesson Plans

Channeling student behaviors, interests, and attention into productive learning paths requires intuitive lesson planning. First, focus on how students will be able to demonstrate that they understand and have achieved the learning objective, emphasizes Grant Wiggins, coauthor with Jason McTighe of ***Understanding by Design***. Then build learning activities that lead students to that point. According to Robert Marzano, an education researcher, the focus of our lesson planning efforts should be getting students to ask and answer their own questions. Coming up with those types of questions on the spur of the moment can be difficult, but with a little advanced thought, you can incorporate those types of questions into your lesson plans. Ultimately, the best discipline management plan is a good lesson plan.

### 5. Establish Behavioral Standards

These standards should promote learning, as well as consequences that diminish or eliminate behaviors that impede learning. They shouldn't be so detailed as to list every behavior and the corresponding consequence for failure to comply, but they should hit the main points regarding showing respect, communicating correctly, and coming prepared to learn. The standards should also interact smoothly with the other four components, especially teaching your students how learning takes place in your classroom. I have learned to frame each lesson as it is taught. This means that for each learning activity, I explain the standards of performance, as well as the limits of behavior. For example: You have 15 minutes, and you will be working with your partner on designing a structure out of newspaper that will reach the ceiling. You may use inside voices to quietly discuss your plans with your partner. If you have questions, please put the red cup on your desk, and I will come and help you as soon as possible. Meanwhile, keep working on other things until I get there.

### From Day One

Establishing an effective plan for classroom management has to begin at the start of school, but it doesn't end there. Throughout the year, we have to be consistent and persistent in developing relationships of trust, following and teaching the best learning theories, honoring student time, being responsive to student behaviors and needs in our lesson plans, and holding true to high and rigorous standards of learning behavior. We also need to be flexible and adjust to tangles that can derail even the best management plans. What classroom management practices have worked best for you?