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25 CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TIPS FOR TEACHERS

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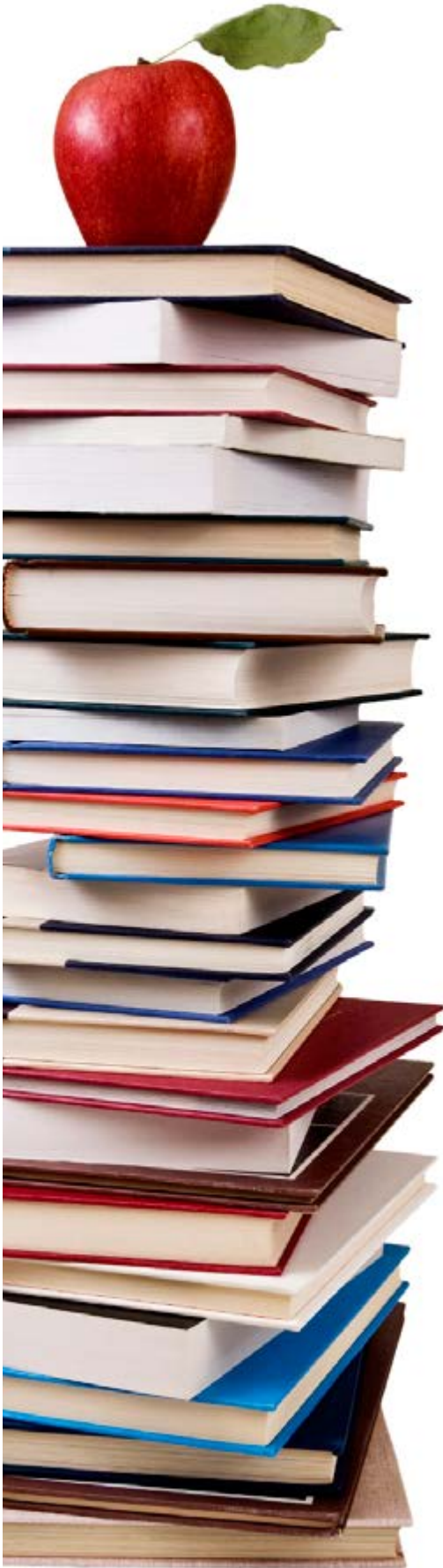
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25 Classroom Management Tips for Teachers

It's easy to forget that kindness, respectful listening and general politeness are learned behaviors—**behaviors we have to teach and model for our students** if we are truly serious about creating an effective and compassionate learning environment. To help you engage your students and manage their behavior in a way that is fair, flexible and consistent, we've put together a list of **25 of our favorite classroom management tips**.



1. Use positive language to describe challenging behavior

Using negative language to describe challenging behavior often distorts the way we see it. Author and educator [Allen Mendler](#) explains that when we use words like “stubborn” or “disobedient” to describe students, our reaction to the behavior will be, most often, negative.

Always use positive language—words like “determined” or “persistent”—to describe challenging students.

2. No more phone calls about bad behavior

Here's a tip we've picked up from one of our favorite bloggers and educators, [Larry Ferlazzo](#): Instead of calling the parents of a student who was not behaving well, tell disruptive students that you will *not* be calling their parents—at least not *that* day.

Instead, let them know that the **phone call will wait until the following week** so that you can report all the good things they've done and how they've improved in the last week.

3. Give fidget buckets a shot

In order to find an outlet for their energy, some students resort to tapping on their desks with pencils, which can be extremely distracting to others. You may be able to help these students by offering them an object from your **fidget bucket**. This may include stress balls, stuffed animals or even random items that you have lying around the house like bottle caps, corks and magnets. Objects like these allow students to keep their hands busy, but still focus on what's going on in the classroom.

4. Allow students to reduce distractions with manila folders

All of us are vulnerable to distractions, but students with ADHD are especially susceptible to them. Some students may benefit from “screening out” visual distractions by building a carrel desk out of two manila folders stapled together to form a three-sided structure.

5. Follow your own rules

Students are bombarded by rules—and by adults who live by the “do as I say, not as I do” adage. Be the example. If you want students to turn their work in when it is due, return their work when you say you will. When you tell students to dress appropriately, do so yourself. When students see teachers not upholding their end of the bargain, it suggests that rules are unimportant and that it's OK for them to break rules, too.



6. Give **Doug Lemov's No Opt-Out strategy** a shot

Say that you're reviewing multiplication facts with your fifth graders. You ask Charlie, "What is three times eight?" Charlie looks down and under his breath mutters, "Don't know."

Using the No Opt Out strategy, you would **turn to another student and ask him or her the same question**. Assuming that the other student answered correctly, you would return to Charlie and say, "Charlie, can you tell me now? What is three times eight?"

You'll notice that there's no lecture and no stopping. All you are doing is **reinforcing that Charlie must participate**.

How No Opt-Out might work with a student who doesn't know the answer

Say you want Charlie to identify the subject of the sentence, "My mother was not happy." Charlie takes a shot at it and says, "The subject is 'happy.'" To redirect Charlie, you might ask the class, "When I asked about the subject, what was I looking for?"

One student replies, "You're looking for *what* or *who* the sentence is about."

You: "That's right."

Now you return to Charlie: "Does this help any, Charlie? Could you tell me what the subject is now?"

Charlie now answers correctly: "Oh, yeah. It's 'Mother.'"

That's great, but what if Charlie still doesn't understand? Simply ask another student, return to Charlie and say, "Charlie, now you tell me: What's the subject of the sentence?" This makes it all but impossible for Charlie to opt out.



7. Start on time

Many teachers don't start class on time. Some are putting final touches on the lesson, writing on the board, or simply waiting around for the rest of the students to show up after the bell rings. Start class on time and do not wait for tardy students. Those who show up on time shouldn't have to wait for those that don't. As an incentive to get your students to class on time, begin your lessons with something they won't want to miss.

8. Rather than aiming at obedience, promote responsibility

It should not be our goal to change students; instead, we should aim to promote self-responsibility so that students can change themselves. One way to do this is by asking students reflective questions:

- "Are you willing to try something different if it would help you?"
- "What would an extraordinary person do in this situation?"

9. Communicate in positive terms

We may have good intentions when we say "Don't look at your neighbor's test" or "Don't run in the hallway," but by saying these things, we've in fact created images of our students looking at each other's tests and running through the hallway!

To avoid this, communicate using positive language: *Do keep your eyes on your own paper; do be sure to walk in the hallway.*



10. Protect against procedural satiation

Here's a tip from veteran educator and classroom management expert [Dr. Richard Curwin](#): Your classroom management strategies may work for a while, but eventually most procedures satiate or stop working entirely. Standing silently in front of the classroom and waiting may work at first, but after a while, no amount of waiting will send the message. Develop between five and ten "get quiet" procedures and switch when one stops working.

11. Rather than impose, elicit

When teachers impose consequences, they also take away the opportunity for students to own the behavior and its consequence.

To promote self-discipline, try eliciting a consequence or a procedure that will help redirect students' impulses. Use questions such as, "**What do you think is a fair consequence for doing X?**" and "**What procedure can we develop so that in the future you will not be a victim of your impulses?**"

12. Select a Code Word

If your students are nodding off, arrange a code word—something fun like "Boom!" or "Shazam!" Whenever students hear this word, they must use both hands to hit the tops of their desks two times and then clap two times. This should wake them up!

13. Conduct regular student reflections

Most of us regularly tell students what we expect of them; less often do we ask them to set expectations for themselves. Here's another tip from [Larry Ferlazzo](#): One way to have students take stock of their behavior and intellectual growth is by **having them write weekly reflections**. As an example, you might consider having students answer and discuss prompts like these:

- Are you a positive or negative person?
- Are you a good or not-so-good listener?
- Who are some people that you respect? How do you think they act when things don't go exactly the way they want?
- Do you think intelligence is fixed? Can it grow with effort?

The idea is for each student to write about how they see themselves in the context of that particular topic and determine if they are satisfied with themselves. If not, encourage them to reflect on how they can improve.

Have students write a goal and **close each Friday** by asking them to assess whether or not they were successful in reaching it.



14. Use daily evaluations

Writing students' names on the board is one amongst many "old school" methods of discipline still used in the classroom. Instead of resorting to this, try **using daily evaluations instead**.

To start, discuss important elements of a healthy classroom. This should be a conversation that includes everyone. Based on this discussion, **develop a check list**, have students grade themselves on each criterion and assign themselves an overall grade at the end of each day. Self-assessments should only take a few minutes to review and comment on.



15. Ensure that your classroom is safe

Pop culture is rife with sarcastic banter and for good reason: it can be funny. But sarcasm in the classroom can be harmful, especially when it's at a student's expense. When students misbehave, it can be tempting to respond sarcastically, but this should really be avoided.

Does sarcasm have a place in the classroom? Most definitely—but it is best to use it at our own expense, not the students'.



16. No more blaming

Conversations with students often become difficult because we focus our energy in the wrong place: assigning blame. Blame is a lot like *truth* with a capital "T": everyone has his or her own version of it and talking in absolutes produces little more than disagreement, denial and frustration.

Students don't like to be blamed, especially when they are—or feel—wrongly accused. Instead of blaming, find a way to talk about *how*, *where* and *when* things went wrong. Then figure out how you might correct them in the future.

17. Roll the Physical Activity Cube

In our perusal of Pinterest, we came across a set of instructions to create a [physical activity cube](#). Each side of the cube has a different exercise—spin in a circle, jump five times, flap your arms like a bird, hop on one foot, etc. When students need to wake up, we pull out the cube and give it a roll.

18. Don't be too worried about your students liking you

You've probably heard of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and even if you haven't, you know from experience that love and intimacy are basic human needs. We all want to love and be loved—but look, you're going to do a lot of damage when you try to earn your student's affection by letting your classroom management slip.

It can feel unnatural, especially for young teachers, to be uptight and authoritative, but keep in mind that **freedom is easier to give than take away**.

Your students have friends—and let's be frank, you'll never be as cool as they are. You are an authority figure and a leader. Act like one.



Classroom management tips 19-22 have been adapted from Robyn Jackson's book, [*How to Motivate Reluctant Learners*](#).

19. If you want behavior to change, be specific

Very often what looks like resistance is actually confusion about our vague requests. Consider the difference between the following:

- “Will you try harder to pay attention in class?”
- “During class, I want you to keep your head off the desk, keep your eyes open and on me, and have all of your materials out on the desk.”

You'll notice how the former not only lacks specific instructions, but does not give the student a clear picture

of what you expect from him or her. Always give your students concrete steps for making the investment.

20. Ask students to commit to something that is achievable

Most students respect teachers who challenge them and maintain high expectations, but pushing students beyond what they are capable of can lead to disengagement, hostility, even mutiny.

Ask students to commit to something that is achievable, but not insultingly simple. To find an achievable investment, Jackson suggests that teachers “pay attention to what the students are investing in already and then select and an investment that is similar but perhaps one step beyond—something achievable with support.”

21. Make changes in behavior meaningful

It's frustrating when our students miss class or don't do their homework. If only they knew how important attendance and homework were, we think to ourselves, they'd change. Wrong.

It's not that students don't think these things are important; it's more likely that they don't share the same value system as us. As Jackson suggests, “Unless we identify an investment we want that is meaningful to them, they will choose not to invest.”

So how do we determine whether or not the investment we want them to make will be meaningful to them? Ask yourself the following two questions:

- *Does the investment provide students with a way to use the currencies they have to get something they want?*
The investment should involve them using something they know and can do to accomplish a goal, acquire new and useful currencies, or solve an interesting problem.
- *Does the investment provide students with a way to use their currencies to satisfy a need?* The investment should involve them using something they know or can do to meet a need for safety and survival, connection and belonging, power and competence, freedom and autonomy, play, enjoyment or fun.



22. Make sure that changes in behavior can be observed

We all want our students to *care*, to *want* to learn and to *try*, but stop right there and consider what these three things have in common. They are all emotions, which means that they are intangible. You can't touch boredom, irritation or passivity and very often you can't even see the physical manifestations of these emotions.

To keep ourselves from being frustrated, Jackson urges teachers to “couch the investment we want students to make in terms of observable behaviors” rather than emotions.

If you want your students to try harder, you must be able to articulate what “trying harder” looks like. Otherwise, you have no tangible way of knowing whether or not your students are actually trying.

Consider the difference between the following:

- “I want you to try harder.”
- “I want you to turn in all of your work according to the set requirements on the rubric, attempt to answer questions—even when you are unsure if you have the right answer—ask for help when you don't understand, and revise your essay according to the standards we discussed last class.”

Unlike the former statement, the latter gives you a concrete way of determining whether or not the students see “try harder” in the same way you do.



23. Be persistent when engaging students

If you need help remembering this strategy, [Dr. Richard Curwin](#) suggests that teachers refer back to the tag line from the classic Arnold Schwarzenegger flick, *Terminator*: “I'll be back.”

When we call on students who are uninvolved or not paying attention, many of them respond with, “I don't know.” Don't allow these students to wear you down. Instead, channel the Terminator. Here's how your dialogue might go:

You: Joe, how do you think that chemical weapons impacted the outcome of WWI?

Joe: I don't know.

You: That's OK. It's a tough question, but you deserve another chance. I'll come back to you.

After you call on a few other students, return to Joe.

You: Joe, what do you think of Ellen's response to the question?

Joe: Don't care.

You: No problem, but I still think you deserve a chance to share your thoughts. I'll be back in a minute.

Continue doing this until Joe gives an answer.

What's the strategy? You're letting Joe know—in a very gentle way—that no one gets off the hook; everyone is expected to participate.

24. Arrange a secret sign with students that lets them know they need to stop

Private conversations usually help curb disruptive behavior, but according to Larry Ferlazzo they may not be necessary if you and the student arrange a “sign” that lets the student know a specific behavior needs to stop. This may be as simple as standing next to a student or tapping on his or her desk.

25. Don't presume that you understand the intentions of others

When we start talking about intentions, we immediately enter murky territory. Don't presume that you know why students do what they do or say what they say. Intentions are complex and making unfounded assumptions about them is a surefire way to sour a healthy conversation about our students' behavior.

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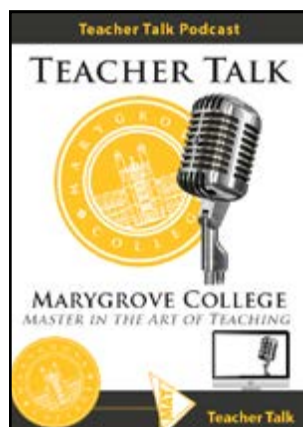
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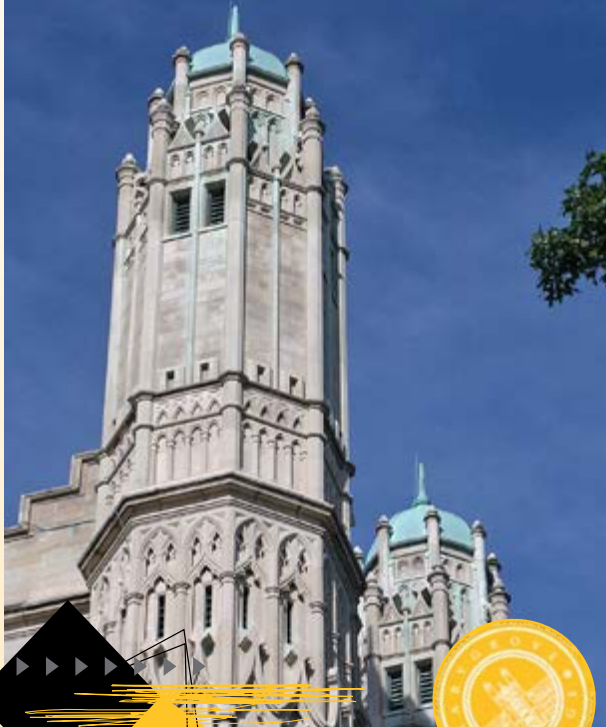
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