



CLASSROOM TIPS FOR TEACHERS



READY TO LEARN

School is a safe haven for children where vast worlds of learning open up to them. They learn and play surrounded by friends and with the example and guidance of teachers. The rituals and routines of the school day give children a sense of order, belonging, and common experience with their peers. Students connect with the values, rituals, traditions, and practices that are distinctly their school's very own. Each classroom contains its own cues that put students in a mind to learn, to let go of burdens, to thrive. Beginnings and endings, each day, are great opportunities for common experiences, for happy rituals. The four techniques listed below may prompt ideas for how to strengthen your students' common experience and ready them to learn! Practice them with joy!

STARTING THE SCHOOL DAY

Greeting Students

As students enter the classroom, teachers stand in the doorway in the hallway, not in their classrooms. Those who are more outgoing will enjoy a greeting from the teacher, others might just appreciate a smile.

Something to Think (and talk) About

PURPOSE: Add a common experience to the school day/week; teach a word, quote, or study tip; maybe rotate these so one day it's a word, next day a quote, next day a study tip; reinforce it throughout the day, including in casual conversation with and between students.

TIME: Approximately 1 to 2 minutes

METHOD: School days typically start with the national anthem and morning announcements. Add to that routine a daily vocabulary word, uplifting quote, study tip, or enticing sentence from a book students may be reading. You may differentiate with one item for lower grades and another one for upper grades. But don't let it stop there. All day long, ask students (in the halls, in the cafeteria, on the playground, as well as in classes) to use the word in a sentence. See if they can recite the quote. Ask about the tip and see if they think they will use it. Elevate the daily item to a common experience for all students (and staff) that connects them to each other in new learning. On Friday, see if a student will volunteer to recite all five days' items during morning announcements. Or resurrect a memory item from a week gone by. Kids delight in common memories.

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STARTING THE CLASS

Acting the Part (behavior check)

PURPOSE: To set the psychological climate in the classroom; cue students to focus in; reinforce attentive behaviors by first fixing body posture, body language

TIME: Approximately 1 to 2 minutes plus quick review.

METHOD: Teacher in his/her station, students have learning materials on desks and in order, students in learning posture, smiles on faces. Yes, smiles on faces!

You, too, Johnny! Good look, Gail! A room of happy learners. Everybody ready? Teacher cheerfully calls out model behaviors. Pro-social behavioral expectations reinforced by teacher. Ready to learn! Next the teacher quickly reviews the previous lesson, popcorn questions, notes the students' progress in mastering new learning and encourages their self-praise. Applaud.

ENDING THE CLASS

Wrap-Up (this I know for sure)

PURPOSE: End every class with an opportunity for all students to voice something they have learned; confirm their learning; express their growing mastery.

TIME: Approximately 3 or 4 minutes

METHOD: The teacher should first summarize the lessons, state what has been mastered, and rehearse the students with popcorn question/answer.

Then ask for them to express it. This may be done with choral response, so that all the students are reciting in unison a key element of what they have learned in the class. Or it may be each student quickly stating something learned. Make it fun. End the class on a high note!

ENDING THE SCHOOL DAY

Every Day in Every Way

PURPOSE: End every school day with students recording the day's chief lessons learned in a journal; confirm ongoing mastery.

TIME: Approximately 4 or 5 minutes

METHOD: In the last few minutes of each school day, ask students to jot a few notes to remind them of what they learned that day. Include what was learned in all classes that day, but only the high points. One or two big lessons learned. Younger students may use picture stories; time-limit the activity so entries are brief and to the point; ask a couple students (different ones each day) what they wrote. Applaud for a good day of learning and personal growth!

OPPORTUNITIES TO MAXIMIZE INSTRUCTIONAL TIME AND ENHANCE LEARNING

There are many ways to offer structure to students who undoubtedly would benefit from a calm and orderly school environment, particularly given the challenges faced when their normal environment has been disrupted. A safe and caring classroom would be most welcoming. There are several classroom routines that help to create and reinforce a sense of order and expectation in students. No unexpected surprises keep the focus on learning.

CLASSROOM ROUTINES

Classroom Rules (expectations)

To create a supportive environment of learning, it is essential to establish positive classroom rules that provide students with positive behavior models to follow.

Best practices for positive classroom behavior include:

- Only a few rules (e.g., 4–5) so that students can easily remember them.
- Use simple language that students easily comprehend.
- Always stated in positive terms, describing expectations that students should be doing rather than not doing (e.g., “Treat others with respect” rather than “Don’t hit, push, yell, or invade the personal space of others”).
- Practice examples and non-examples of behaving according to the rules.

Encourage high rates of active student responding (ASR)

Use strategies that promote active participation of all students. ASR strategies increase participation and decrease disruption, and provide real-time formative assessment information to teachers.

Provide frequent and explicit feedback

Let the students know (often) when they are meeting teacher expectations. If the students are working quietly or partnering as directed, the teacher should let them know how well they are working.

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Teach
students to
ask for help

Watch the class after directions or instructions are given. If several hesitate, let the class know how to ask for help. The class can be directed to say, "Can you please repeat the question/directions?"

Be
engaged

Interact by moving through the classroom. When students are working, offer corrections or feedback for active engagement. Teachers should not sit at their desk.

Use time
efficiently

Set a timer for all transitions and let students know how much time is permitted and praise for meeting the timeframe. Putting away supplies, taking out materials, passing out papers, collecting papers, lining up, even sharpening pencils should have a time limit.

Help keep
students
organized

Strong organizational skills also allow for maximizing instructional time. Provide instruction on how to organize papers, use a heading, dispose of papers when not needed, how to pack a backpack, and provide check on organization.

ACTIVE STUDENT RESPONSE TACTICS THAT MAXIMIZE INSTRUCTION AND SUPPORT REAL-TIME FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Given that teachers may not be familiar with their current students due to split sessions, temporary groupings, unfamiliar classrooms, and school closures, we suggest educators use this time to increase student engagement and develop or reinforce the fundamentals underlying strong reading, writing, and mathematics. An engaged class supports a sense of teamwork and encourages learning as a priority. The two strategies suggested here can be customized for particular subject areas.

CLASSROOM ROUTINES

Choral Responding

Choral Responding (CR) uses brisk instructional pacing to increase student responsiveness to instruction. Used during group and whole-class instruction, students respond orally in unison as the teacher asks a series of questions that require brief responses (such as math facts, reading vocabulary, and spelling words). It can be used to review material as well as teach new information and provides real-time formative assessment for the group as well as individual students (when called upon).

PREP FOR CHORAL RESPONDING

- Select curricular content appropriate for short questions and answers. Choose content for which students can make frequent responses (e.g., stating the vocabulary word for definitions, naming science concepts).
- Schedule a 5- to 10-minute CR session. Use short CR lessons for different subjects throughout the school day.
- Prepare your questions and instruction materials. Keep CR questions short and require only one correct, one-to-five-word answers (e.g., How many sides does an octagon have?).

CONDUCT CHORAL RESPONDING

- Model a few questions and responses for the class. (Example: Say, “I’m going to ask some questions about yesterday’s science lesson. If I hold up this paper clip and ask, ‘What will a magnet do to this object?’ on my signal, you say, ‘Attract’ or ‘Repel!’”)
- Present questions clearly and directly. Avoid long explanations or discussion to maintain student attention to content.
- Allow thinking time. For difficult questions, have a longer pause between your question and your signal to respond. Hold your hand up with your palm out (as a gesture to “wait”) to cue students to get ready to respond on your signal.

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CONDUCT CHORAL RESPONDING (Continued)

- Use a clear signal. Clear signals such as a snap, a clap, or simply saying, “Everyone” indicate when it is the students’ turn to respond. A cue helps students respond in unison, making it easier for the teacher to detect correct and incorrect responses.
- Give feedback on the group response. If all students respond correctly, give specific praise and move on to the next question. If most students respond correctly, but a few do not, state the correct answer and return to it later. This will give those students an opportunity to correct their mistake.
- Call on individual students throughout the lesson. This formative assessment tactic allows you to assess low-performing students who may have difficulty with the content. If low performers answer correctly, you can be confident that other students are also correct. Use this as an opportunity to reinforce a student’s accuracy, not to single out a student for his or her mistakes. Ask your question before calling on a student so that students don’t “drop out” when it is not their turn.
- Maintain an energetic pace. Present the next question immediately after you have given feedback on the previous response. Fast pacing promotes students’ participation and accuracy, and decreases off-task behavior.
- Deliver praise and approval for students’ participation and correct responding. Your praise and approval can increase students’ motivation and make the CR lesson more fun.

CHORAL RESPONDING CAN BE USED FOR:

CONTENT REVIEW of previously learned concepts or serve as a “maintenance check” of mastery of earlier concepts (Example: a high school history teacher could review the day’s Civil War lesson by saying: “Okay, class. I’m going to ask a series of questions about what we’ve covered in today’s lesson. Your response will be ‘Confederate’ or ‘Union.’”).

WARM-UPS for a range of basic academic skills or in morning drills (no longer than 10-15 minutes) to provide structure at the beginning of the day. Content from all subject areas can be covered, adjusted to students’ grade/ability, and should progressively and systematically become more challenging over time. Before students arrive, set up the materials needed (e.g., chalkboard, dry-erase charts, or overhead transparencies). Review content could include calendar skills, counting in multiples (e.g., 5 to 50, 2 to 100, 3 to 30), basic math facts, money skills, telling time, story problems, sight words, words from a “word wall,” vocabulary, spelling, sentence punctuation, map skills, and science and social studies facts.

BACK AND FORTH. This game gives students practice on basic skills while playing in teams (teacher vs. students, between two groups of students, or one on one). Teams take turns responding, trying to answer a continuous question (such as counting forward, backward, counting in multiples, spelling out a word, reciting a poem line by line, etc.). Example: Counting by 3’s: One team says a number and the other team has to quickly respond by saying the next number in sequence (e.g., Team one says, “3.” Team two says, “6,” team one, “9” and so forth) until a team makes a mistake. If needed, allow teams to earn points for correct responding.

Response Cards

Response cards are simple to make and can be used across different content areas and grade levels. Students simultaneously hold up a “card” in response to questions posed by the teacher. Students can also ask the questions of the class as another way for the teacher to check on their understanding. Advantages of response cards include:

- every student is engaged all the time
- the teacher is collecting formative assessment information as students are responding
- the teacher can adjust instruction based on the immediate feedback s/he receives
- students receive immediate feedback from the teacher

One simple way to create a response card is to fold an 8 ½” x 11” paper (lined or unlined) in half and then half again. This creates 8 faces on which students can write individual responses. These cards can be used to check for:

- basic mathematics facts or responses to mental math problems
- a science term based on a verbal description given by the teacher
- understanding of geography terms

Response card can have ‘pre-made’ content; old cardboard cut into pieces can serve this purpose well. For example, the words “Yes” and “No” written on either side or the same side of the card (two different colors can serve the same purpose). Cards can be made with numbering from 1–3 or 1–5. This approach can be used to gauge how students feel about issues, including how they are responding to the current situation. Smiley/frowning faces or words at the extremes help students know what the numbers mean. Finally, response cards can be used for short-answer open-ended responses. Depending on their ages and abilities, students can draw and/or write responses to more complex or creative prompts, including:

- From the description I just read, draw a picture of the setting for this story/scene.
- Why did the main character respond in that way?
- What do you think will happen next in the story?
- In three of your blocks on your response card, draw or write the beginning, middle, and end of the story.
- Write at least four different math sentences to express 18, including the use of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and/or division.
- How are you feeling about what is happening here in the Virgin Islands after the hurricanes?
- What are you thankful for?

These are just a few of the many ways Response Cards can be used to engage students, provide formative assessment information to the teacher, and offer opportunities for students to express their feelings and emotions to traumatic as well as pleasant events in their lives.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See the Center on Innovation in Learning's website at: www.centeril.org

Enhancing Engagement Through Active Student Response

[http://www.centeril.org/publications/Active%20Student%20Response%20\(Final\).pdf](http://www.centeril.org/publications/Active%20Student%20Response%20(Final).pdf)

Choral Responding

Good Noise! Using Choral Responding to Increase the Effectiveness of Group Instruction

http://autism.outreach.psu.edu/sites/default/archive_files/58Handout_-_Good_Noise.pdf

Response Card Procedures

<http://ebi.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Responce-Cards.pdf>

High School ELL Class

<http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/student-response-cards>

Response Cards: Increasing Student Engagement

<https://www.autismclassroomresources.com/response-cards-increasing-studen/>

Middle school science class YouTube video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXZ9BUw6XFc>

Response cards in the Mathematics class

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2c6M0hJz0j8>