Top Proven Classroom Management Tips

Teaching is tough job, no doubt about it. And working with young children can be a little overwhelming at times, especially when class sizes are large. But many seasoned educators have a sixth sense when it comes to classroom management—what works and what doesn’t—and thankfully, many of their strategies are available on the web and in print to help other teachers achieve the same success. So check out our list of proven tips to help you manage your classroom more efficiently and effectively.

Tip #1: Establish classroom rules immediately and enforce them consistently.

Establish rules on the first day of class, and always follow through on the specified rewards for achievement and consequences for misbehavior. If you allow a student to get away with misbehavior without consequence even once, you’ve opened the door to future misbehavior and negotiation of rules. This is particularly important at the beginning of the year, when you’re building your students’ trust in you as their teacher.

Tip #2: Set logical rules and consequences.

Keep the goal of learning in mind and make sure students know *why* the rules are what they are: “We walk instead of running in the hallway because we want to make sure that everyone is safe.” And fit the consequence to the crime: If a student makes a mess of the art supplies, the logical consequence is to clean it up. Arbitrary punishments like losing recess, or something else unrelated to the offense, teach students that you are mean and trying to force a power struggle.

Tip #3: Use positive instead of negative language.

As soon as you tell someone not to do something, the first image in that person’s head is what you said not to do. I’ll show you: Don’t think about ducks wearing hats. Are you thinking about ducks wearing hats? Thought so. To avoid the meddlesome subconscious, opt for positive-language instead of negative-language rules. For example:

1. “Be prepared” instead of “Don’t forget your pencil.”
2. “Shut the door quietly” instead of “Don’t slam the door.”
3. “Listen to your teacher and peers” instead of “Don’t talk in class.”

And use the word “consequences” instead of the extremely negative “punishments.”

Tip #4: Make your students feel responsible for their own learning environment.

Give your students agency over their learning environment, which gets them feeling responsible for their own learning. Create rules together as a class, encourage those with leadership personalities to direct the in-class discussion, and walk around instead of standing up front for the entire lesson so that you aren’t the funnel for conversation. Ask students to “check” themselves, as in “Check yourself to see if you are using your indoor voice,” which sends the message that you see the students as individuals who are capable of handling themselves.

Tip #5: Praise efforts and achievements for their own sake, not for the sake of teacher approval.

Give constant feedback about good behaviors: “I notice that Danielle has her book out and is ready to go. Now her whole row is ready!” But keep the emphasis on the behavior, not on the teacher’s approval. Avoid saying, “I like how…” because it doesn’t matter what the teacher likes. Students shouldn’t do things to please the teacher; they should do things because they are the right things to do.

Tip #6: Be mindful of different learning paces and keep the students occupied.

Not all students learn at the same pace. Stick with those who don’t understand the topic and check in with them regularly to help them keep up to speed and don’t get frustrated and act out in response. On the flipside, bored students cause problems. Make sure that you are challenging the students who move more quickly through the material by over-planning and preparing extra, quiet activities. For example, if a student has finished their still life painting with 20 minutes to spare, challenge them to step up to the next level — introduce an unfamiliar object and a clean piece of paper.

Tip #7: Avoid confrontations in front of students.

It is never a good idea to make an example of a student by shaming them in front of his or her peers. If you’re dealing with a misbehavior, speak to the student in the hallway or after class to resolve the issue instead of allowing an in-class confrontation.

Tip #8: Connect with the parents.

Make contact with parents early and often. Encourage attendance at parent-teacher conferences, if your school uses them, and demonstrate that you want to work with the parents to instruct their children to the best of your ability. If you develop a good relationship with the parents, you’ll open a dialogue between parent, student, and teacher that allows for a freer flow of feedback — and it always helps to have the parents’ trust.

Tip #9: Interactively model behaviors.

The first time you do something, show the students how to do it. Then ask them to share what they noticed about what you did. Then ask a student to do it, and discuss that action with the class. Then have the whole class practice. If you go slow the first time, you’ll be able to go faster later with the assurance that all the students know how to perform the action the right way.

Tip #10: Get the attention of every student before beginning class.

This doesn’t require shouting “Be quiet, class is beginning” — in fact, that’s almost sure to backfire. Instead, stand silent and wait until the students shush each other and settle. Or, if that’s not your style, redirect the beginning-of-class chatter by throwing out an engaging question, comment, or observation: “It’s been snowing for three days straight! Has anyone been playing in the snow?” Once you have everyone’s attention, proceed with the day’s lesson plan.

Tip #11: Use proximity and directness to your advantage.

If a student is misbehaving in class, continue your lesson but walk over and stand next to them. Having a teacher so close usually shuts down a student’s misbehavior. You can also use a direct question to snap them back into the lesson: “Kevin, why do you think Hamlet is so indecisive?” Be sure to start the call-out with their name so that they hear the full question.

Tip #12: Be organized.

Structure, both within a lesson and throughout the academic term, will help your students stay on top of their work. Write the day’s activities on the board before class. Hand out a syllabus at the beginning of the semester and stick to it; if you get off track, provide a revised syllabus so that students always know where they are in the course. During class, be prepared for each ensuing activity; lag time waste both your and your students’ time and introduces apathy into the classroom.