

Specific Teacher Skills

Teaching, in a nutshell!

The teacher ... is expected to elicit work from students. Students in all subjects and activities must engage in directed activities which are believed to produce learning. Their behavior, in short, should be purposeful, normatively controlled, and steady; concerns with discipline and control, in fact, largely revolve around the need to get work done by immature, changeful, and divergent persons who are confined in a small space. (lib.dr.iastate)

Specifically, how do we do this? There are skills a teacher can have to achieve better classroom management and reduce student distractions. They fall under some general categories from (edglossary).

Behavior

- the ability to monitor student behavior provides an awareness of what happens at all times in the classroom which prevents potential problems escalating into serious distractions (lib.dr.iastate)
- the ability to do more than one thing at the same time (lib.dr.iastate)
- willing to assume responsibility for solving problems (lib.dr.iastate)
- is always alert to opportunities that promote student self-discipline (lib.dr.iastate)
- using erect posture ... not timid, and remain confident and just (Wikipedia Classroom Management)
- [using] the appropriate tone of voice depending on the situation ... do not use an abrasive, sarcastic, or hostile tone when disciplining students (Wikipedia Classroom Management)
- taking care not to ignore inappropriate behavior by taking action (Wikipedia Classroom Management)

Environment

- the impression that the teacher creates as a "helping person" (lib.dr.iastate)
- orchestrate smooth transitions between activities [to] prevent the potential for distraction (lib.dr.iastate)
- planning the time available (thoughtco)

Expectations

- set high expectations for student behavior and for academics (thoughtco)
- explicit in communicating expectations (lib.dr.iastate)

Activities

- to challenge students with a variety of activities that generate interest and enthusiasm (lib.dr.iastate)
- establish a consistent, daily routine that begins as soon as students enter the classroom (edglossary)
- use long-term, solution-oriented approaches concentrating on helping students understand and cope with conflicts or problems that caused their inappropriate behaviors (lib.dr.iastate)
- specific corrective feedback was applied to students who misbehaved (lib.dr.iastate)
- redirected those either confused or inattentive back to the lesson at hand (lib.dr.iastate)

Improving Student Behaviors

We'll start with techniques designed to improve the way your students, as a group, behave in your classroom.

One technique is called the "How Not" strategy.

The "how not" strategy is so powerful because it clarifies for students exactly what unacceptable behavior looks like, and they'll immediately recognize it. In fact, when you use this strategy, you'll find your students laughing and nodding their heads knowingly.

Some of its power comes from its entertaining qualities. When you use the "how not" strategy, your students will be fully engaged. They may even clamor for you to teach it again.

After using detailed modeling to demonstrate a specific part of your plan, or a certain classroom procedure, model *how not* to do it.

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Ham it up and have fun with it.

The more you exaggerate the unwanted behavior, the more memorable it will be for your students.

...

The "how not" strategy works so well because it points out the absurdity of poor behavior.

...

Seeing things from a different perspective changes the way students view their world. Allow your students to see what their poor behavior looks like and how it affects others, and it will hit home like no other classroom management strategy.

(smart classroom improve)

While I am not certain I would use this technique for every behavior I want my students to have, it certainly might work well for certain issues, like “how to behave when you arrive late to class.”

Another is called “A Simple Way to Improve Listening”.

Stand in one place.

Find a spot in your room where your students can see you without turning in their seats. Pause there a moment and ask for their attention. You’ll not only give your directions from here, but you’ll stay in this spot until they’re finished following them.

Give your directions once.

After receiving their quiet attention, give the directions you want them to follow *one time*—which is the key the strategy. Speak in a normal voice, erring on the side of too softly than too loudly.

Let them flounder.

The first time you use this strategy your students may struggle. How much they struggle will be an indicator of how bad things have gotten and how readily they disregard the sound of your voice. Go ahead and let them be confused and unsure of what to do.

Remain motionless.

Resist the urge to jump in and repeat yourself, cajole, or talk them through what you want them to do. Just stand in place and observe. Reveal nothing in terms of what you’re doing or why you’re doing it.

Let your leaders take over.

Slowly, leaders will emerge to either model for the others what to do or speak up and do the cajoling and repeating for you. This is good. Allow them to take on this responsibility.

Wait.

Don’t move or say anything until they’re finished following your directions and quiet. Pause for 30 seconds or so to let the lesson sink in.

Give the next direction.

When you’re satisfied that all of the science folders are out on their desks, or whatever direction was given, give your next direction. The second time should be noticeably better—faster, sharper, and needing fewer leaders.

Continue giving directions once.

If the second direction went better than the first, then you're on the right track. Go ahead and give another. Eventually, and as long as you're giving directions only one time, you'll be able to increase the complexity.

Make it practice in the beginning.

You may want your first foray into this directions-only-once strategy to be practice. Start slow. Ask your students to do one simple thing—like clear their desks. In time, your students will be able to follow multiple step directions with ease.

If the first time is a disaster . . .

If the first time you try this strategy your students are unable to get it completed (arguing, confusion, disharmony), that's okay. All hope isn't lost. Simply ask for and wait for their attention, then start over from the beginning. They'll get it.

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Why It Works

Students become poor listeners when they know they don't have to listen.

You see, when they know you'll repeat yourself and hold their hand through every direction and every lesson, they have no reason to listen.

When they haven't been forced—or even allowed—to think for themselves, when they're unburdened by any responsibility to pay attention, they tune out. They daydream. They let life happen to them.

It's human nature.

But when you give directions only one time, and your students know that that's all they're getting, then they learn quite naturally, automatically even, to tune in to the sound of your voice.

They learn to listen for what you want.

And each time you use this strategy, which isn't so much a strategy as the way things ought to be, more and more students will come on board. More and more students will become less dependent on you and more dependent on themselves.

Habits will change.

Maturity and independence will grow.

And listening will become a matter of routine.

(smart classroom simple)

This harks back to the classroom management styles, where you don't want to be a co-dependent enabler. It also sets students up well for the next class they take and even for their jobs and careers.

I think the first direction to give is to get them to pay attention to you in the first place. That looks like a good starting point, especially for the first day of class. Here is a suggested technique:

The ability to ask for and receive your students' attention is crucial.

It's crucial because it saves precious learning time. It improves listening and performance.

It allows you to give instruction anytime you need to and know that it will be heard and understood.

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Step 1: Explain why.

It's good practice to explain why what you're asking of your students is important and worth practicing—in all areas of classroom management.

This is a critical step in motivating them to not only go along with your expectations, but to agree with them on the basis that they make the classroom better and more enjoyable.

This underscores the importance of selling not just your lessons, but anything and everything you want your students to be able to do well.

Step 2: Choose a signal.

Many teachers prefer train whistles, bells, and other manufactured sounds to signal for attention.

And although these can work fine (as long as you remain in the classroom), your voice is a better option—because it will help develop the habit of listening attentively whenever you speak.

It will develop the habit of consistently following your directions.

It's an act of respect that will affect how they view you as the leader of the classroom. I recommend a simple: "Can I have your attention please?"

Step 3: Expect an immediate response.

The biggest mistake teachers make is allowing students more time than they need to respond. This is key.

When you frame your expectations in any terms other than immediate, your students will push their response time back further and further.

The result is that you'll be waiting for their attention for increasingly longer periods of time until, at some point, they just won't bother.

By expecting your students to be looking and listening to you before you even get to the end of your sentence, you'll never have to wait and rarely have to reteach.

Step 4: Model it.

Your students need to see exactly what giving you their attention looks like. To that end, sit at a student's desk and pretend you're working independently or as part of a group.

You may also want to model other common scenarios like, for example, if they're up and getting a tissue or playing a learning game or rotating through centers.

Have a student play the part of the teacher while you engage in the activity. Upon their signal, stop what you're doing, turn your body to face them, and listen without moving.

You're setting your expectations and thus should model precisely what you want. Adding how not to do it is also a good idea.

Step 5: Make practice fun.

Practicing routines and expectations with a spirit of fun will always result in greater buy-in.

If you give your students something silly to say while they're pretending to work in groups, or engaged in other scenarios, learning will be faster, deeper, and longer lasting.

Any nonsensical phrase will do. In the past, I've used "hey, hey, whaddya say," "murmur, murmur," and "blah, blah, blah," as well as a few others. The goofier, the better.

Allow them to talk for 30 seconds or so, and then ask for their attention. Practice until they're able to be still, silent, and looking at you in less than two seconds.

Everything Easier

It's best to put the routine into play as soon as possible.

(smart classroom attention)

The next technique addresses students talking on the side.

Side-talking can be especially frustrating because, although it's done out of earshot, it's remarkably disruptive.

When your students turn their attention away from you and to a neighbor, they miss important instruction and learning time ...

It can also delay them from getting their independent work done and distract them from deeper understanding. Furthermore, side-talking begets more side-talking, as students catch the contagion and pass it along to others.

Ignoring the problem just isn't an option.

You can certainly enforce a consequence, but an oft-repeated and valid complaint from teachers is that it can be difficult to determine who exactly is doing the side-talking and who is merely listening or asking the other to stop.

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1. Define it.

Before you can begin fixing the problem of side-talking, you must define it for your students. They need to know specifically what your definition of side-talking is and what it looks like.

There may be times when you allow it—or a form of it. If so, your students need to know when those times are and what appropriate side-talking looks like. Modeling all forms—right and wrong, appropriate and not—is key to their understanding.

2. Provide them a tool.

Once your students are clear about what side-talking is, and when it is and isn't okay, the next step is to empower them with a tool they can use to curb inappropriate side-talking on their own and without saying a word.

The tool you'll show them is a simple hand gesture they'll display to whoever attempts to side-talk with them during a lesson, while immersed in independent work, or whenever you deem unacceptable.

3. Teach them how to use it.

As long as it isn't culturally offensive, any sign or motion of the hand will do. Crossing the first two fingers and shaking lightly is a good way to go. It's a gesture conspicuous enough for you to see from across the room and all students can perform it easily.

To show how it works, sit at a student's desk or in a table group while your class is circled around. Pretend to be focused on your work or a lesson when a classmate leans in to interrupt. Quickly and pleasantly show your signal and then turn back to whatever you were doing.

4. Practice politeness.

It's important to emphasize that the gesture is nothing more than a polite reminder to a friend. It's like saying, "I'm sorry, but I can't talk right now." It isn't aggressive or angry and it should never accompany any talking or admonition.

Pair students up or put them in groups and have them practice, reminding them to use pleasant facial expressions and body language. Show them precisely and thoroughly how it's done this first time, and they won't do it any other way.

Be sure and also practice the appropriate response when on the receiving end of the gesture. Namely, a quick nod of the head and then back to fulfilling their responsibilities.

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This simple, nonverbal communication between two students attacks the problem at the source and sends the message, each time its given, that interrupting a fellow student during critical listening or independent learning time is off limits.

And because it comes from within, it is a powerful deterrent.

(smart classroom curb)

One thing you, as instructor, will have to do before implementing this technique is decide when it is and is not appropriate to have side-talking. Think about your experiences both as student and teacher. Then make a list and label them as acceptable and not.

Next up is the idea of using pauses in your talking to help students learn and focus.

One of the most common errors teachers make when presenting lessons, providing directions, or otherwise addressing students is to string sentences together with very little gap between them.

In other words, the teacher will move from one thought, idea, or bit of information to the next without delay—often filling the gaps with ands, ums, likes, and meaningless words.

It's how most of us speak in our day-to-day life.

But the negative effect it can have on students, and on your ability to keep their attention, is substantial. You see, bridging phrases together without allowing your students time to absorb them makes you uninteresting and difficult to follow.

It causes students to turn their attention away from you and toward the daydreams, distractions, and misbehavior opportunities around them.

A simple way to correct this problem, and at the same time become a more effective teacher, is to include frequent, and at times even lengthy, pauses in your speech.

Here's why these little gems of silence are so powerful:

They're predictive.

Anticipating answers and outcomes improves learning, and when you pause, your students will instinctively predict what you're going to say next. You can use this instinct to your advantage by pausing before revealing important ideas, words, theories, or points of emphasis.

They build suspense.

When used strategically, a pause creates suspense and curiosity in the listener, causing them to sit up straighter and lean in closer. It can make the most mundane information seem interesting and worth listening to—making easier a critical skill many teachers struggle with.

They add depth and drama.

Pausing can be as important as content when presenting lessons. With the right timing and pace—and a bit of attitude—it can infuse your words and the visualizations you create with depth and drama, flair and emotion. It can help bring your curriculum to life, giving it the punch and energy it needs to matter to your students.

They discourage misbehavior.

Speaking without intentional pausing sounds like droning to students, who are quick to lose interest, grow bored, and misbehave. An occasional two or three second pause breaks up the

familiar tone of your voice, keeps students on their toes, and helps them stay checked in and on task.

They allow you to adjust.

A pause gives you a moment to quickly assess your students' understanding. It allows you to make eye contact, stay in touch, and make adjustments to your teaching along the way. It trains you to be sensitive to their needs and attuned to their nonverbal reactions to your lessons.

They help your students retain information.

An occasional pause, if for only a second or two, breaks ideas, theories, and directives into chunks, allowing them to sink in before your students are rushed along to the next thing. This improves memory and understanding and gives your students a framework from which to build upon more learning.

It's The Simple Things

There are no hard and fast rules about when, how often, or how long you should pause. You learn and become better and nimbler at using them through experience.

At first, pausing just a couple of seconds may seem like a long time. It may feel strange and uncomfortable—even for your students.

But in time, you'll love the impact it has on your teaching.

You'll find yourself speaking with more confidence—using your body and facial expressions more, becoming more dynamic and more willing to take chances with storytelling, playacting, and the like.

Your words will have more power. Your lessons will prove more effective. Your students will be more attentive and more interested in you—and less interested in misbehaving.

Like much of classroom management, it is the simple things—the tried and true—when applied consistently, day after day, and perfected over time . . .

That adds up to great teaching.

(smart classroom pause)

I have noticed that pausing after I say something important often gives students a chance to ask a question – and that question addresses the very next point I plan on making. Not only does this help me assess student learning, but it gives me the opportunity to point out to the student what a great question it is.

Another important aspect of improving student behavior is setting limits. The advice here is insightful and specific, and helps set the right attitude for creating and stating those limits.

- **Setting a limit is not the same as issuing an ultimatum.**
Limits aren't threats—*If you don't attend group, your weekend privileges will be suspended.*

Limits offer choices with consequences—*If you attend group and follow the other steps in your plan, you'll be able to attend all of the special activities this weekend. If you don't attend group, then you'll have to stay behind. It's your decision.*

- **The purpose of limits is to teach, not to punish.**

Through limits, people begin to understand that their actions, positive or negative, result in predictable consequences. By giving such choices and consequences, staff members provide a structure for good decision making.

- **Setting limits is more about listening than talking.**

Taking the time to really listen to those in your charge will help you better understand their thoughts and feelings. By listening, you will learn more about what's important to them, and that will help you set more meaningful limits.

(cpi setting limits)

The same site offers a five-step approach to limit setting. They offer it as “a productive way to deal with out-of-control individuals,” but I see it as a way to deal with any individual who needs to understand societal rules and norms.

- 1. Explain which behavior is inappropriate.**

Saying “Stop that!” may not be enough. The person may not know if you are objecting to how loudly he is talking or objecting to the language that he is using. Be specific.

- 2. Explain why the behavior is inappropriate.**

Again, don't assume that the person knows why her behavior is not acceptable. Is she disturbing others? Being disrespectful? Not doing a task she's been assigned?

- 3. Give reasonable choices with consequences.**

Instead of issuing an ultimatum (“Do this or else”), tell the person what his choices are, and what the consequences of those choices will be. Ultimatums often lead to power struggles because no one wants to be forced to do something. By providing choices with consequences, you are admitting that you cannot force his decision. But you can determine what the consequences for his choices will be.

- 4. Allow time.**

Generally, it's best to allow the person a few moments to make her decision. Remember that if she's upset, she may not be thinking clearly. It may take longer for her to think through what you've said to her.

- 5. Be prepared to enforce your consequences.**

Limit setting is meaningless if you don't consistently enforce the consequences you've set. For that reason, it's important to set consequences that are reasonable, enforceable, within your authority, and within the policies and procedures of your facility or school.

Limits are powerful tools for teaching appropriate behavior. Their purpose is not to show who's boss, but to give the individuals in your charge guidance, respect, and a feeling of security.

(cpi setting limits)

Improving You, The Teacher

These techniques are designed to help you manage your class and make your teaching life easier in the long run.

The first is considering the way you speak to your students.

It's common for teachers to bemoan the state of listening in their classroom.

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Rarely will they look inward and analyze their own practice.

They assume that students either listen well or they don't, and that they have little to do about it.

But the truth is, you have a profound effect on listening.

Consistency, temperament, likability, clarity, presentation skills, and even tidiness are all important factors.

There are also strategies that can improve listening almost instantaneously, which you can find in our archive.

But one of the most important factors is how you speak when giving directions. What follows are three simple changes that can make a big difference.

1. Talk less.

Most teachers talk too much. Their voice is a looping soundtrack to every day—reminding, warning, micromanaging, and guiding students through every this and that.

If you cut the amount of talking you do by a third, and focus only on what your students need to know, then what you say will have greater impact.

Your words will reach their intended destination, and your students will begin tuning you in rather than tuning you out.

2. Lower your voice.

It's common to increase your volume to get students to listen better. But a loud voice is unpleasant and too easy to hear. It causes them to look away and busy themselves with other things.

When you lower your voice, however, and speak just loud enough for students in the back of the room to hear, they instinctively lean in. They stop moving and rustling.

They read your lips, facial expressions, and body language. By requiring a small amount of effort, your students will listen more intently.

3. Stop repeating.

When you repeat the same directions over and over, you train your students not to listen to you the first time. You encourage apathy and lighten their load of responsibility.

Saying it once creates urgency. It motivates action and causes students to stay locked in to the sound of your voice.

It also invests them in their learning. They begin to understand that education isn't something that is done to them. Rather, it's something they go out and get for themselves.

Stay The Course

If you're struggling with listening, the above strategies will do wonders. At first, however, they may cause things to get worse.

Because your students have grown accustomed to you taking on the burden for their listening, they may very well ignore you.

They may become even slower to action.

This is normal. It tells you how far learned helplessness has taken root in your classroom. But once they feel the shift in responsibility from you to them, they'll begin to change.

They'll begin looking at you, tracking your movements, and anticipating what you want them to do next.

They'll begin nodding their heads and eagerly completing your directions.

They'll become empowered to do for themselves because responsibility feels good. It's important. It fills with pride.

It makes good listeners.

(smart classroom speaking)

A related technique is how you conduct yourself in your classroom: stage presence.

There is a common misconception that you must have a big presence to be an effective leader.

You must psych yourself up, throw your shoulders back, and move boldly among your students.

Your voice must boom.

Your walk must swagger.

Your eyes must squint and narrow in on your charges.

And while classroom presence is important, it isn't born of overconfidence, forcefulness, or aggression.

It's born of gentleness.

Here's why:

Gentleness is respected.

21st-century students respond best to a calm, even-handed approach to classroom management. They appreciate honesty and kindness. They respect it, and thus, are quick to listen and please their teacher.

The older the students are, the more this is true.

Gentleness lowers stress.

Without saying a word, a gentle presence removes classroom stress, tension, and anxiety. It soothes and alleviates excitability and distraction—which are two major causes of misbehavior.

It equals a happier, more productive classroom.

Gentleness curtails pushback.

Enforcing consequences calmly and consistently diminishes the possibility that your students will argue, complain, or lie to you about their misbehavior.

Instead, they'll quietly take responsibility.

Gentleness builds rapport.

When you carry yourself with a gentle demeanor, you become more likable to your students. In fact, it's an easy and predictable way to build powerful leverage, influence, and rapport.

Which makes everything easier.

Gentleness feels good.

Beginning each morning with a poised, easygoing manner will make you a lot happier. Inconveniences won't get on your nerves. Difficult students won't get under your skin.

You'll be refreshed at the end of every day.

Gentleness Isn't Weakness

Weakness is when you lose emotional control.

It's when you lecture, berate, and admonish students instead of following your classroom management plan.

It's when you take misbehavior personally.

Gentleness, on the other hand, is strong. It's capable and confident. It says that you're in control and that your students can relax and focus on their responsibilities.

This doesn't mean your lessons won't be dynamic and passionate. It doesn't mean you won't be enthusiastic or you won't demand excellence from your students.

Gentleness isn't sleepiness. Nor is it afraid and cowering in a corner.

It's a calm, reassuring approach to managing your classroom that communicates to every student that you're a leader worth following.

Martin Luther King Jr. was gentle. So were Rosa Parks and Abraham Lincoln.

And so are the happiest and most effective teachers on earth.

(smart classroom gentleness)

Have you ever given your students "the look"? Here is an argument against that strategy. Note that this is different from making eye contact with your students, which can be a beneficial move.

It's a popular strategy.

You notice two students talking and giggling during a lesson, for example.

So you move into their field of vision and give them "the look."

You deliver the old evil eye.

You communicate with your piercing stare and tight lips that you dislike what they're doing.

That they better cut it out, or else.

Which may indeed stop them from continuing to disrupt your lesson.

The problem, however, is that the strategy causes more misbehavior in the future.

Here's why:

It's antagonistic.

Whenever you glare at students, or otherwise try to intimidate them into behaving, you create a you-against-them relationship.

You make it personal. You give the impression that not only are you angry, but you dislike them personally. After all, when someone gives a dirty look, that's the natural conclusion—especially with children.

It causes private hurt and resentment and ultimately results in you having far less influence over their behavior choices.

It's confusing.

When you give a "look," you have no way of knowing whether your students understand what it means. They may not even be sure you're looking at them or what behavior you're referring to.

Short of saying, "Hey Emily, I gave you that look earlier because you weren't on task," chances are they'll be confused.

Effective classroom management requires you to communicate clearly with your students, to tell them directly how they transgressed the rules and what will happen as a result.

It's inconsistent.

When you promise to follow your classroom management plan, but then go back on your word and glare instead, you send the message that you can't be trusted.

Furthermore, the use of intimidation, no matter how mild it seems in the moment, isn't accountability. It doesn't result in students taking responsibility or vowing to do better in the future.

It just makes them angry and emboldened to misbehave behind your back. A leader worth following is someone who does what they say they're going to do.

No Friction

Giving a "look" is another in a long line of strategies that can curb misbehavior in the moment, but that make classroom management more difficult down the line.

Sadly, this strategy is recommended by more than a few educational "experts." It's passed around as a viable solution because, by golly, it gets Robert back on track.

But now Robert can't stand his teacher and has little motivation to push himself academically.

To create a peaceful learning environment that frees you to be the inspiring and influential teacher you were meant to be, you must be able to hold your students accountable without causing friction.

You must follow your classroom management plan as its written and give them an opportunity to take responsibility all on their own—without your dirty looks, lectures, or two cents.

In this way, you maintain your likability and influence. You safeguard your relationships. You create a world that makes sense, a world your students love being part of.

A world where you can teach without disruption.

(smart classroom the look)

What about student accountability? I have no problem expecting my students to be responsible for their choices but then I worry about how this could make me a "mean teacher" and have groups of students running to the dean about it.

Building rapport is one of the secrets to reaching, influencing, and then transforming the most difficult students and classrooms.

But it can also be a source of confusion.

Many teachers become so committed to this one important strategy that they lose perspective. They go too far. They venture beyond effective means of building rapport and into unhealthy deference.

Before long they're kowtowing to students—bargaining, giving in, walking on eggshells, and looking the other way in the face of misbehavior.

They fear that if they truly hold them accountable, the relationship will suffer. Their students won't like them anymore, and they'll lose the precious influence they've worked so hard to achieve.

But it isn't true.

In fact, when you let misbehavior go without a consequence, when you let poorly followed routines slide and difficult students off the hook, you *lose* influence. You never gain it.

Without fixed and faithfully defended boundary lines of behavior, without sky-high expectations for courteousness and respect, without detailed, here's-how-we-do-it instruction backed by fair accountability, your students will disregard you.

It doesn't matter how kind and understanding you are. It doesn't matter how sympathetic or friendly or funny. It doesn't matter if you shower them with the love of ten people.

If you fear accountability, your students will walk all over you. They'll become flippant and blasé, brazen and disrespectful. They'll become too cool for school and absolutely, positively too cool for you.

They'll view you not as a leader worth looking up to, but as a weak-kneed peer they can manipulate and dismiss with a wave of the hand. Of course, not all students will behave this way, but the tone and tenor of your classroom will surely reflect this inescapable truth.

One of the most overlooked aspects of building a strong relationship with students is your ability to protect them from disruption, disorder, chaos, and the like. It's your ability to engender confidence that when they come to school, you've got their back.

Although important, building rapport isn't all about likability. It's also about strength and leadership. It's about doing what you say you will and safeguarding every student's right to learn and enjoy school.

It's about doing what is best for them and their learning—which may entail redoing routines and procedures. It may entail being late for recess to reteach how to work in groups. It may entail sending a student to time-out during the coolest lesson of the week.

Yes, they may grumble and complain under their breath. They may sigh and look to the heavens. They may practice walking in line for the second time in a row like they're heading for the gallows.

But they know deep down that coming from you it's justified.

It's right and true and one of the reasons why your classroom is the best and happiest they've ever been part of. It also reflects a world that makes sense, that resonates with the innate truth of right and wrong etched upon every heart.

In the hands of a fair and consistent teacher, accountability works. It works in the suburbs and in the inner city. It works in the backwoods, the small town, and the largest metropolis.

It prepares students for what is required for success in school and beyond. It teaches, it protects, it humbles in the healthiest, most wonderful way.

(smart classroom accountability)

Many teachers I've spoken to for this project have said it is important to "pick your battles." Here is an argument against it.

The idea behind this popular strategy is that if you get involved in every misbehavior, then you'll find yourself in an argument, a confrontation, or a battle of which you have little time for.

The thinking is that it isn't worth the stress and trouble, that it may even cause behavior to get worse. Better to ignore the little things and respond only to serious or more disruptive infractions.

It's often cited as a good strategy to use with certain students, particular classrooms, or even as a general rule of thumb with all students.

But here's the thing, the straight scoop: Picking your battles will prevent you from ever turning around difficult students or creating the well-behaved classroom you really want.

Here's why.

It causes resentment.

Choosing to respond to misbehavior sometimes and not others breeds resentment—because it's unfair and students know it. From their perspective it looks like you're playing favorites. Why does he get away with talking during lessons and I don't? It's a question every student will ponder and grumble over.

You'll lose trust.

Whenever you fail to follow your classroom management plan as promised, your integrity takes a hit. Trust is key to developing likability, respect, and an easy rapport with your students. Without it, you won't have the influence you need to effectively manage your classroom.

It's confrontational.

When teachers speak of picking their battles, they're referring to having a confrontation. In other words, they intend to lecture, scold, question, or otherwise persuade students into compliance. It's often ugly, always personal, and catastrophic to the critical student-teacher relationship.

It encourages arguing.

Because it's personal, few students will take your third degree without a response. It's a battle, after all, and they're going to fight back. This might include lying, talking back, offering excuses and denials, and a silent promise to misbehave again the first chance they get.

Note: Many difficult students have become so battle weary and sensitive that they'll argue at even the slightest, gentlest correction.

It causes disrespect.

Teachers often "pick their battles" with students who are prone to disrespect. But inconsistency and confrontation are like adding fuel to the fire. Together, they all but cause disrespect by poking, prodding, and frustrating your most challenging students into angry and contemptuous behavior.

You'll be tested.

As soon as your students see evidence of inconsistency, they'll begin testing you at every turn. It is among the most predictable of student behaviors. Unfixed boundary lines lose their effectiveness, and with it, you lose your ability to fairly and without drama hold your students accountable.

It's unnerving to students.

How does one go about picking battles? Is it based on the severity of the misbehavior, who is doing the misbehaving, the teacher's mood at the time? The truth is, leaving classroom management so haphazardly defined causes tension and anxiety and creates a climate students don't want to be part of.

Never A Need To Battle

With confrontation and inconsistency equal parts of the toxic brew, picking your battles is like shooting yourself in the foot and pulling the rug out from under yourself at the same time. It's a circus gaffe that has somehow become common, even sage, advice.

To build and maintain your trust, rapport, and likability, to be respected and looked up to, to manage your classroom effectively and gracefully, you must never "pick your battles." Or engage in battles whatsoever.

For there is no need, not with a well-taught classroom management plan to do the heavy lifting for you. Let it be your statement of accountability. Let it define and defend your boundary lines of behavior.

Let it free you from the arguments and confrontations, the wasted time and the stress of picking your battles. Let it safeguard your influence, protect your relationships, and restore peace and fairness to your classroom.

In other words, let it do its job.

(smart classroom battles)

What I like about this argument is that it enforces the idea that there should never be a battle in the first place. Correct the behavior and go on teaching. Be gentle, be fair, talk calmly, and avoid escalation.

One website gives a very good idea for helping a teacher keep calm and enforce the rules:

It's a simple analogy, but it helps clarify how best to hold students accountable.

The advice is this: **When enforcing consequences, think like a referee.**

A referee's job is to make sure players abide by the agreed-upon rules of the game. That's it. They make no judgments or decisions of their own accord.

They have a rule book that lays out the parameters of the game, and they pledge to follow it to the letter.

They watch the action closely, and when they see a foul or penalty, they blow their whistle and apply the specified consequence. It's automatic, something they do without pause or timidity.

A good referee is defined by their calm and consistent adherence to the rule book—the purpose of which is to make the game safe and fair for all participants.

When a good referee is in charge of a game, play is smooth, competitive, and representative of good sportsmanship.

(smart classroom keep cool)

What Not to Do

All the techniques discussed so far may or may not be applicable to you and your classroom. However, you might still have management issues. Below is a discussion of how classroom management should work and also a checklist of things you shouldn't do, just in case you haven't noticed yourself doing them.

Classroom management shouldn't *feel* difficult.

If you're straining, trying hard, and feeling heavy burdened, if you're stressed-out and exhausted at the end of the day, then something is amiss.

You see, exceptional classroom management is knowledge based, not effort based.

It's knowing what works and putting it into action and what doesn't and discarding it.

It's letting proven strategies do the heavy lifting for you, giving you the confidence to take *any* group of students, no matter how challenging or unruly, and transform them into the class you really want.

Done right, classroom management should feel liberating. In large part, this feeling of liberation comes from what you *don't* have to do.

Below is a list of 50 ineffective, stressful, and burdensome methods of classroom management.

Some are myths. Some are misconceptions. And others you just may feel like you have no choice but to do.

But the truth is, by replacing them with what *really* works, with what *really* results in a happy, well-behaved classroom, you're gloriously free to pitch them all on the scrap heap.

50 Things You *Don't* Have To Do

1. You don't have to lecture, yell, or scold.
2. You don't have to micromanage.
3. You don't have to ignore misbehavior.
4. You don't have to be unlikable.
5. You don't have to tolerate call-outs and interruptions.
6. You don't have to use bribery.
7. You don't have to walk on eggshells around difficult students.
8. You don't have to give false praise.
9. You don't have to send students to the office.
10. You don't have to implore your students to pay attention.
11. You don't have to say things you don't truly believe.

12. You don't have to be humorless, stern, or overly serious.
13. You don't have to repeat yourself over and over again.
14. You don't have to *work* on building community.
15. You don't have to beg or coax or convince your students into behaving.
16. You don't have to waste time and attention on difficult students.
17. You don't have to *do* more or say more to have better control.
18. You don't have to show anger or lose your cool.
19. You don't have to lower your behavior standards.
20. You don't have to talk so much, so often, or so loud.
21. You don't have to have an antagonistic or demanding relationship with difficult students.
22. You don't have to shush your students or ask repeatedly for quiet.
23. You don't have to give frequent reminders and exhortations.
24. You don't have to show hurt or disappointment to get your message across.
25. You don't have to guide, direct, or handhold your students through every moment of the day.
26. You don't have to be thought of as a "mean" teacher.
27. You don't have to use threats or intimidation to get students to behave.
28. You don't have to have friction or resentment between you and any of your students.
29. You don't have to use behavior contracts to turn around difficult students.
30. You don't have to give over-the-top or gratuitous praise.
31. You don't have to plead with your students to follow your directions.
32. You don't have to use different strategies for different students.
33. You don't have to tolerate a noisy, chaotic, or unruly classroom.
34. You don't have to talk over your students or move on until you're ready.
35. You don't have to accept being disrespected, cursed at, or ignored.
36. You don't have use complicated classroom management methods.
37. You don't have to be fearful of holding your students strictly accountable.
38. You don't have to hold time-consuming community circles or hashing-out sessions.
39. You don't have to be negative or critical to motivate your students.

40. You don't have to cover up your personality or hold back from having fun.
41. You don't have to tolerate arguing and talking back.
42. You don't have to ask two or three times or more for your students' attention.
43. You don't have to offer praise for *expected* behavior.
44. You don't have to rely on parents, the principal, or anyone else to turn around difficult students.
45. You don't have to be overbearing or suffocating to have excellent control.
46. You don't have to give incessant talking-tos to difficult and disrespectful students.
47. You don't have to ask students *why* they misbehaved or force assurances from them.
48. You don't have to have a boring, no-fun classroom to keep a lid on whole-class misbehavior.
49. You don't have to be tense, tired, and sick of dealing with misbehavior.
50. You never, ever have to be at the mercy of your students.