

Guide to Effective Classroom Management

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The ideas and techniques in this guide are provided to help improve classroom management skills and minimise some of the anxieties associated with controlling a classroom of expectant and sometimes over-zealous learners.

Effective classroom management is gained through the tutors:

- reputation for effort, flexibility and availability,
- reputation for firmness and fairness,
- subject knowledge and technical competence,
- ability to keep the learners focused, engaged and wanting to learn,
- responding forcefully and fairly to challenges to their authority.

Building a reputation for effort, flexibility and availability

A positive reputation for effort, flexibility and availability will precede the tutor. The following will help build and maintain this reputation:

- Be in the classroom 10-15 mins before the class begins (if timetabling allows).
- Start on time. Wherever possible be accessible to individual learners without letting them dominate the class.
- Ensure the lesson is well planned, is relevant to the subject & level of the course and meets the needs of individual learners.
- Make constant checks on learning and the progress of individual learners.
- Be familiar with the group profile, their previous knowledge and experience and their preferred learning styles (results of initial assessment will indicate these).
- Whenever a decision has to be made during the class, invite the learners to take part and contribute to the outcome.

Building a reputation for firmness and fairness

A positive reputation for firmness and fairness will also precede the tutor. The following will help build and maintain this reputation:

- Explain why the class has been asked to do various things. For example, if the class needs to be quiet during peer presentations say "It is essential for the class to be quiet and attentive during the presentation because the class will be asked to provide feedback on the presentation and also it is courteous to listen whilst others are talking".
- If something happens that is unacceptable, do not tolerate it. Inappropriate behaviour, language, racism, sexism etc should be challenged immediately and dealt with in accordance with the college's policy and procedure.
- Keeping the classroom's atmosphere as relaxed as possible will help ensure compliance with reasonable requests and it is much more effective to communicate without disruption.
- Fairness also includes recognising good behaviour and learner effort.
- Use the learners' names.
- Give praise for good behaviour, contribution, attention etc.
- Avoid sarcasm or shouting, these can indicate that you are losing or have lost control.

Subject knowledge and technical competence

Learners will judge their tutors' knowledge and technical competence by the tutors' ability to answer their questions regarding the subject matter and on how well the tutor demonstrates competence.

How questions are handled plays an important part of how the lesson will progress at the correct pace. All questions should be welcomed as they arise; if learners are told to hold all questions until the end of the lesson they will be lost and the learners may lose interest. Remember: what one learner asks, many learners are probably wondering about.

Requests for clarification that are appropriate to the level of the learners should be answered right away where possible. Other learners could be invited to give it a try first.

Off-topic questions can be handled with a brief answer or a brief digression if appropriate. If the topic of the question has already been covered, this should be mentioned and ask the questioner to review. If it is to be covered soon, ask the learners "Shall we spend a few minutes on this now, or shall we wait until (whatever day)" and do what they ask.

Start with an attention-grabber regarding the topic you are teaching and finish with something about how they will use the material, information etc. in the future. This will arouse their interest at the beginning of the lesson and explain the relevance of what has been covered at the end.

Keeping the learners focused, engaged and wanting to learn

One of the most important abilities a tutor must have is being able to explain the content of the lesson clearly.

Keep the class focused by involving them. Learners will lose focus if the lesson is merely a rehash of a text book, is too tutor-led or lacks regular changes of activity. Involve learners in discussion and debate.

Encourage learner voice. Pair and group work encourages this and allows the tutor an opportunity to get amongst the learners and check on individual knowledge and progress.

Activities designed to bring two or more learners to the front of the room will help keep the rest of the class focused. Getting learners to write on the Interactive Whiteboard, game show and quiz scenarios also work well as they introduce some competitiveness.

When one highly-capable learner attempts to dominate the classroom, inviting that learner to be your assistant for the lesson will enable the tutor to prevent the learner dominating the classroom.

Responding forcefully and fairly when authority is challenged

Anticipate the question, "Why do we have to know this?" with an answer that is truthful. It may be that it is a mandatory requirement for the qualification or it will be an aid to future learning.

If a learner is persistently noisy, stop teaching and use the silence as the vehicle of disapproval. Tell the learner the purpose of him/her being there (to gain a qualification). Explain that the other members of the class want to learn, and he/she is interfering with that.

When dealing with a heckler, act sympathetically rather than angrily as being angry will only fuel the fire and make the heckler aware that he/she is getting to you.

If you deserve the attention of the learners, and show you are trying to manage/control the classroom, the problems will usually be solved by the learners themselves.

"Do you think you can maintain discipline?" asked the Superintendent. "Of course I can," replied Stuart. "I'll make the work interesting and the discipline will take care of itself"

E.B White, Stuart Little