

How To

Manage Your Classroom Effectively

Want to create a positive, engaging, and orderly learning environment? Sharpen your classroom management skills with these tips from the experts.

Classroom management includes everything from seating to transitions to engagement to discipline. What classroom management should not include is a command-and-control approach, says Carol Ann Tomlinson, a professor in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and coauthor of ASCD's *Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom*. "If a teacher's notion is to manage, [his] style becomes domineering," says Tomlinson. "This results in resistance from students and an adversarial relationship."

Some teachers, especially new ones, confuse classroom management with discipline, says Tomlinson's coauthor, Marcia Imbeau, who is a professor of curriculum and instruction in the College of Education at the University of Arkansas. Although discipline is an element of classroom management, other elements, such as established routines and mutually designed guidelines for good behavior, can foster a manageable environment while greatly reducing the number of disciplinary incidents.

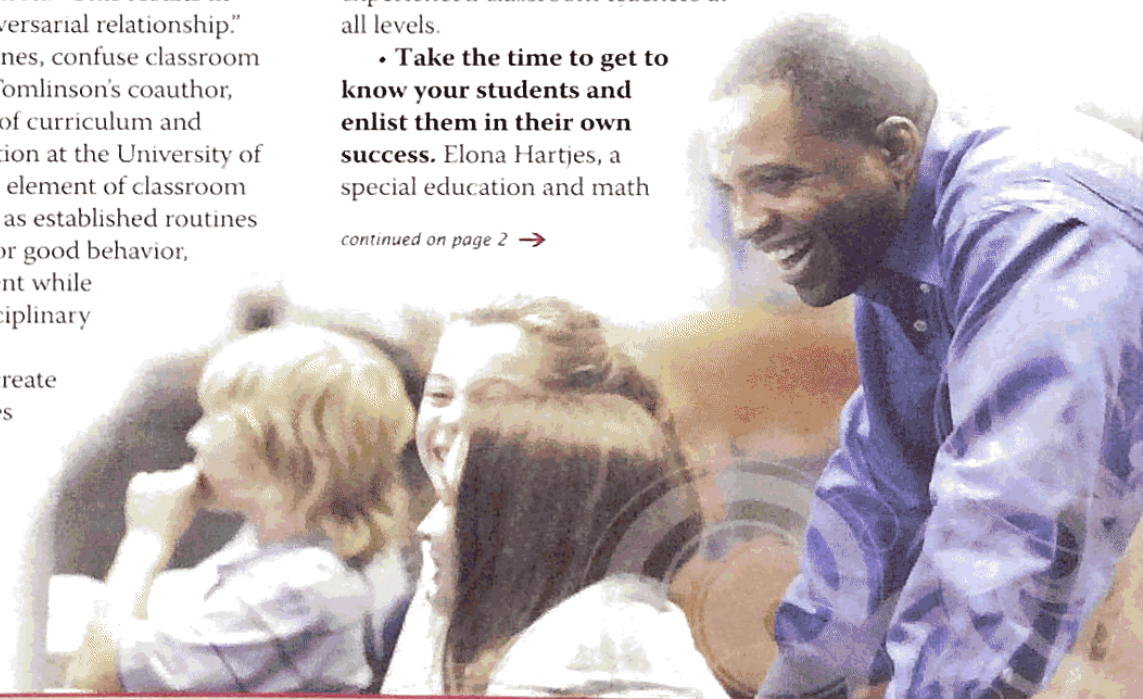
The goal, says Tomlinson, is to create the kind of environment that studies have shown to be most conducive to learning: one that is orderly but enabling. "An orderly/enabling environment facilitates high-quality learning,"

Tomlinson says. There should be a defined structure with clear processes and expectations, but the structure should include enough flexibility to accommodate students' needs.

A solid set of classroom management strategies can combine with a defined structure to help create an environment that is orderly, but the enabling part is up to the teacher. Here are a few favored strategies from experienced classroom teachers at all levels.

- **Take the time to get to know your students and enlist them in their own success.** Elona Hartjes, a special education and math

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Education Update is the official newsletter of ASCD, 1703 North Beauregard Street, Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA. Telephone: 1-800-933-ASCD (2723) or 1-703-576-9600.

ASCD website: www.ascd.org

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Education Update is published 12 times a year.

ISSN: 1091-3623



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teacher at Woodland Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario, has been teaching for 29 years. She has been writing her blog, *Teachers at Risk* (www.teachersatrisk.com), for five years. One of her most popular posts is titled, "Nine Questions I Ask My Students on the First Day of School," in which she describes how she asks students about their learning successes and difficulties.

"I want the students to know that we are a team, and that we each play a part in the learning," Hartjes says.

• **Collaborate with your class to create guidelines for appropriate classroom behavior.** It's important to enlist kids in the creation of these guidelines, especially at the high school level, says Hartjes. "I emphasize to them that they're in grade 9; they're experts at school by now. We work together to create four basic behavioral guidelines for the year and to describe what each behavior, such as attentive listening, looks like. Kids won't buy in otherwise."

• **Establish a routine for starting class.** Post a problem or a writing exercise on the board that students will begin as soon as they stow their gear in their desks. Also, create a seating chart so you can take attendance without calling roll, suggests Tomlinson.

• **Establish a signal that indicates when students should stop talking**

and give you their full attention. Never talk when students are talking; doing so diminishes your leadership role and doesn't motivate them to stop talking, says Tomlinson. The signal could be a bell, a hand clap, or dimming the overhead lights—whatever works for you. Susan Alexander, a middle school English teacher at Berkeley Preparatory School in Tampa, Fla., uses a vibraphone (a vibrating percussive instrument) for this purpose. The vibraphone's tone can take several minutes to dissipate, says Alexander, who notes that students naturally become quiet as they strain to hear when the tone will stop completely.

• **Give clear directions.** "Consider what good quality will look like. Communicate the process for how to do the task well," says Tomlinson. You can also make "task cards" and place them in the center of tables or on the board so kids can remind themselves of the steps they need to take to finish a project.

• **Create a strategy for kids to request help.** When you're working with students one-on-one or in small groups, you want the others to have a way to get help without interrupting you. Formulate a strategy for this and ensure students understand it, says Imbeau. Some teachers use "check with three before me"—meaning that students should ask three classmates before going to the teacher for help. Other teachers place "hint cards" in a central location that students can check when they get stuck.





At the elementary level, students can place “stoplight cups”—green, yellow, and red—on their desks as nonverbal signals of understanding.

- **Find creative ways to set the mood.** Alexander, a former professional actor, director, and writer, borrows from her theater background to harness kids’ energy and set the mood in the classroom. “You can create an environment with lighting and sound that is appropriate to your underlying message,” she says. “After all, a play begins before the actors take the stage.” Alexander might put colored gels on the overhead lights, project an image onto the wall, and play music as students enter the room.


- **Use technology strategically (or, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em”).** Many students have cell phones or smart-phones, so figure out how you can leverage those devices to aid in classroom management, suggests Lori Gracey, executive director of the Texas Computer Education Association. For example, at www.todaysmeet.com, teachers can create private forums where they can post questions for students to answer, tweet-style. “Students are writing rather than talking,” Gracey notes. “Students using technology are paying attention, responding to their teacher and to each other.”

- **Practice flexible grouping.** Imbeau emphasizes that it’s important for kids to be exposed to diverse personalities, interests, and ability levels as you work together to build a community of learners. “Flexible grouping supports the

idea that students can learn from each other,” she says. She works hard to mix up groups throughout the week, charting them out and keeping notes on her rationale for her student pairings.

- **Provide opportunities for collaboration.** “Kids are dying to collaborate,” Alexander notes. Set aside time for students to work together to solve problems, conduct research, and play games that build teamwork.

- **Allow kids to use their own words.** In her “Fish bowl” exercise, Alexander places three chairs in the middle of a large circle of students seated on the floor. She asks a provocative question—one designed to foster conversation, with many possible valid answers—but only students seated in the chairs may respond. Once students in the center have spoken, they must relinquish the chairs and return to the larger circle. The exercise gives each student the opportunity to be heard.

- **Plan a high-quality curriculum.** This is the Holy Grail—the strategy that will render all your other classroom management strategies unnecessary. “A high-quality curriculum is an effective method of discipline,” says Tomlinson. “Students who feel that they belong, that they have a voice, and that they understand classroom routines are more engaged. Engagement gives them less of a reason to rebel.” 

—JENNIFER J. SALOPEK



Video: Want to see examples of effective classroom management in action? Use your smartphone to scan the QR code and watch a clip from the ASCD video *Classroom Management that Works*.

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