

# BEST PRACTICE #4

## Set Your Routine and Structures Early . . . and Keep Them!

If you've ever substitute taught or covered a colleague's classroom, you know that you can tell a good teacher the moment you walk into their class. Even when their usual teacher isn't there, the students know what to do. They enter a certain way, they go to their seats, they do a specific procedure first, they ask to do certain things and know not to ask to do others. This classroom routine shows the teacher set structures early. These types of classrooms run like a well-oiled machine, especially in the first five to ten minutes of class. Routines should be taught in the beginning of the school year, just as content is taught.

Setting structures early almost guarantees a successful year. Let students own the routine. Humans tend to keep habits. Without habit, classroom and life may be exciting, but we start to feel out of place. Give students a habitual way to start and end your class.

### Tips for Establishing Classroom Structures

- **Make it easy.** Make sure your structures are not too tedious. If a student needs to get a pencil, do they have to sign ten release forms? Or is there a basket always in the same place that holds

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pencils? If the structures make sense and show you value the students, then they will work.

- **Consistency is key.** Don't change your structures too often. I'm not saying don't *ever* change structures, but having an established routine makes students feel comfortable. Students learn to remember and do daily things automatically. If you keep changing things—even if the new structures are better—they'll forget what the newest structure is and just follow none. Decide on structures that work early on.
- **Structure the beginning of class.** Give structure to the beginning of your class period by asking the students to do the same type of thing at the beginning of class every day. Think about how your own personal morning routine before you get to school sets you up for the rest of the day. This way, if kids come in groggy they will know what to do automatically. An example of a great daily structure is outlined in the following steps:
  1. Go directly to your seat and sit.
  2. Place your backpack on the back of your chair or on the floor.
  3. Take out your homework log and record your homework.
  4. Start the warm-up exercise on the board.

Once you do the same routine for about seven days, the students will get in the habit of doing it, and the routine will become comforting to them. They will feel successful since they are following the rules. Remember to praise students each and every time they follow your routine, no matter how easy. Post the opening routine somewhere in the room for your visual learners or any students who need a

gentle reminder. It will save you a lot of frustration if you can just say the student's name and point to the routine instead of repeating yourself. I have found a PowerPoint slide helps with this. Split your computer screen and project that slide (so you can take attendance as students do the morning rou-

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line). Pro tip: Place a smiley face on the slide somewhere and "Good morning/afternoon Period \_\_\_\_\_." All you have to do is change the period number or class name, project the slide, and boom—you're free for the first several minutes of class to take attendance and get ready for the lesson. Posting the routine on a screen also creates student agency, builds confidence, and projects positive vibes from the start of your class.

**Routines that need to be set as early as possible in Week 1:**

- ▶ Technology sign-out
- ▶ Tardy student policy
- ▶ Students assigned technology numbers; this is most effective if technology numbers are on student names on seating chart
- ▶ Classroom books sign-out
- ▶ Bathroom pass/log (if necessary)
- ▶ Where are assignments turned in?
- ▶ Where can missing work be found for absent students?
- ▶ Where is homework written on the board for students to record?
- ▶ Cell phone/electronic device policy for your classroom

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## Your Turn

1. Look at the above list of routines. What is a structure or routine that you've seen work well in a classroom for one of the items?

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2. In your opinion, are there any of the above items that do not need a structure and/or routine? Why?

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3. Do you think it's more important to have a routine to begin the class, a routine to end the class, or both? Why?

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