

● The Well-Managed Classroom¹

by Harry K. Wong

Harry K. Wong has over 35 years experience in classroom teaching. He lectures to educators and administrators around the world. His students have won more than 200 awards for academic excellence. With his wife, Rosemary, he authored The First Days of School, a best-selling book for teachers. Wong has received many awards, including the Outstanding Secondary School Teacher Award, the Outstanding Biology Teacher Award, and the Valley Forge Freedom's Foundation Teacher's Medal.

Effective teachers typically have specific characteristics in common—positive expectations for student success, the ability to manage a classroom effectively, a knowledge of lesson design that leads to the students' mastery of lessons, and the drive to continuously learn about and grow within the teaching profession.

The First Days of School is a guidebook that my wife, Rosemary, and I wrote to help teachers everywhere be as efficient and effective as they can, regardless of their teaching style or level of experience. We have devoted a whole unit of the book to each important quality of an effective teacher. Of all these things, the principles of successful classroom management are probably the most important. Every student and teacher will be more successful in a well-managed classroom.

What Is Classroom Management?

Classroom management refers to all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that learning can take place. This management includes fostering student involvement and cooperation in all classroom activities and establishing a productive working environment. Let's examine some characteristics of a well-managed classroom.

The Characteristics of a Well-Managed Classroom²

1. Students are deeply involved with their work, especially with academic, teacher-led instruction.
2. Students know what is expected of them and are generally successful.
3. There is relatively little wasted time, confusion, or disruption.
4. The climate of the classroom is work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant.

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Beginning the Year as an Effective Teacher

Establishing a well-managed classroom early in the school year (and in the teaching career if possible) can help a teacher avoid being part of the 40 percent each year who leave the profession discouraged and overwhelmed.

Contrary to what many people believe, the number-one problem in the classroom is not discipline—it is the lack of procedures and routines. Classroom management has nothing to do with discipline. You manage a store; you do not discipline a store. You manage a classroom; you do not discipline a classroom. Behavior will rarely become a problem when effective teaching is already taking place. On the first day of school, you can begin teaching the procedures and routines that you will use. Never assume that you will have time to tackle bad behavior later. Becoming an effective teacher depends on classroom management—especially on the first day of school.

Classroom Management on the First Day of School

- Make sure your classroom is ready. Teachers who prepare their classrooms in advance maximize student learning and minimize student misbehavior. Readiness is the primary determinant of teacher effectiveness.
- Do everything possible to welcome the students and to make sure that they know where to go and how to get there on time.
- Keep in mind that what you do on the first day may determine how much respect and success you will have for the rest of the school year.
- Arrange student seating to maximize the accomplishment of the tasks and to minimize behavior problems. Assign students to their seats on the first day of school.

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Example of an Introduction

In order to have the respect and image that you desire in your class, you need to start off the year on the right foot. If you introduce yourself in a simple and positive manner, you will help the students feel comfortable in your class and communicate your positive expectations for the year. I love to stand at the door on the first day with a giant smile on my face, hand stuck out in an invitational pose, waiting for those “little darlings” to come down the hall. There are two major things you want to state at the outset on the first day of school: your name and your expectations. The following is an example:

Welcome. Welcome to another school year.

My name is Mr. Wong. There it is on the chalkboard. It is spelled W-O-N-G and is pronounced “wong.” I would like to be addressed as Mr. Wong, please. Thank you.

I am looking forward to being your teacher this year. Relax. I have over 30 years’ experience as a teacher. I am what is called an experienced, veteran teacher.

In addition, I go to workshops, conferences, in-service meetings, college classes, and seminars. I also read the professional journals and work together with my fellow teachers. I am a competent, knowledgeable, experienced, and professional teacher.

Also, I love to teach, and I am proud that I am a teacher. So relax. You are in good hands this year with me, Mr. Wong. You are going to have the greatest educational experience of your life. We will not only study (subject), but I will also share with you some life-skills traits that will help you to be successful in tomorrow’s world.

I can assure you that if you should run into me at the shopping mall 25 years from now, you will say, “You were right, Mr. Wong. That was the most memorable, exciting, and fascinating class I ever had.”

So, welcome!

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Continuing the Year as an Effective Teacher

Procedures and routines facilitate classroom management. A procedure is not a discipline plan, nor is it a threat or an order. Rather, a procedure is a method or process for accomplishing things in the classroom—for example, what to do when entering the classroom, how to function in a lab group, or what to do when you have a question. A series of procedures and routines creates a structure for the classroom. When students know how the classroom operates, the class suffers fewer interruptions. A class with few interruptions is a class that advances learning.

Classroom Management All Year Long

- Organize a well-managed classroom in which students can learn in a task-oriented environment.
- Start the class by giving an assignment, not by taking roll. There is no need to involve the class in the roll-taking process.
- Post your assignments in the same place every day if you want your students to do them.
- Make sure that your grade record book shows the results and progress of each student at all times.
- Remember that a smooth-running class depends on your ability to teach procedures.
- Present your rules clearly, and provide reasonable explanations of the need for them. Write the rules down, and permanently post them in the classroom. Give them to students on paper or have the students copy them into their notebook.
- Keep in mind that rules are most effective when there are consequences to face if students break them and rewards if students follow them. When you see a violation of one of the rules, immediately and quietly give out the penalty as you continue with the lesson or classwork.

Classroom Procedures

As in real life, there are procedures in the classroom. Every time the teacher wants something done, there must be a procedure or a set of procedures. Some procedures that nearly every teacher must teach include the following:

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- procedure for dismissal at the end of the period or day
- procedure for when students are absent
- procedure for quieting a class
- procedure for the beginning of the period or day
- procedure for students seeking help
- procedure for the movement of students and papers

Procedure for the Beginning of the Period or Day

An effective teacher always has the procedure or schedule posted or ready for distribution when the students arrive. Research has shown that effective classroom managers

- 1) have an assignment posted before the students enter and
- 2) have it posted in the same consistent location every day. This way, the students know that they are to get to work immediately upon entering the classroom.

I put an assignment on the board every single day before the students come into my classroom. I now have one of the smoothest running classrooms, and the students produce more for me now than at any other time. And I have been teaching for 14 years.

Lisa McKuIn, science teacher

Alma High School

Procedure for When Students Are Absent

Much class time can be wasted, and a class can become disrupted, if a teacher has to spend time gathering materials for a student who has been absent. Having a procedure for getting make-up work allows teachers to manage their classrooms effectively and puts the responsibility and accountability on the student.

Julie Guillory, a high school science teacher outside Houston, Texas, has a bulletin board with the daily worksheet and make-up work posted in envelopes. The students know where to find their work and what to do if they have been absent.

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The Student Who Is Absent

I have a procedure for roll taking and for students who are absent. I have three students trained to take the roll on a rotating basis. They do this while the students are completing their opening assignment.

If a student is absent, they complete a form that says, “Make-up work for Mr. Hockenberry,” clip it to the work that has already been prepared, and place it in an envelope along one of the walls marked with the appropriate period.

A returning absent student does not come to see me. When absent students return, they obtain their work from the envelope. If they don’t understand something, they ask one of the three students before coming to me for help. They seldom do, and class proceeds quickly with the lesson for the day.

Ed Hockenberry

Midlothian Middle School

Teaching Classroom Procedures

Most behavior problems in the classroom are caused by the teacher’s failure to teach students how to follow procedures. Teachers must learn how to effectively convey the procedures just as students must learn how to follow the procedures. Below is a summary of an effective method of teaching classroom procedures.

The Three-Step Approach to Teaching Classroom Procedures

1. **Explain:** State, explain, model, and demonstrate the procedure.
2. **Rehearse:** Rehearse and practice the procedure under your supervision.
3. **Reinforce:** Reteach, rehearse, practice, and reinforce the classroom procedure until it becomes a student habit or routine.

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Effective teachers know what activities need to be done and have worked out the procedures for each of them. It is urgent that you have the procedures for each activity ready on the first day of school. Revise and hone these procedures year after year until they become models of efficiency.

Effective teachers spend a good deal of time during the first weeks of school introducing, teaching, modeling, and rehearsing procedures. Do not expect the students to learn all the procedures in one day. Behaviors must be taught, modeled, practiced, monitored, and retaught.

When procedures are performed correctly, there should be words of praise and smiles. Effective teachers reinforce the correct technique by having the student perform the technique over and over again, each time exhorting the student to do it better.

For example, if a student rushes into the classroom and pushes another student, ask him or her to return to the door and try again. Tell the student why. Give the student specific directions (walk quietly, don't push anyone, go directly to your seat, begin the work that is posted on the board, etc.), and be sure to use the student's name and say "please" and "thank you" to model respectful behavior.

Example of Teaching a Procedure: Quieting a Class

Do you yell, scream, and flick the lights to get your class quiet, with no good results? Quieting a class can be achieved with the following easy steps:

#1 Explain

Students, I have a procedure to get your undivided attention. You will see me stand here with my hand up. Or I may hit a bell because some of you will not be able to see my hand while you are working in a group. When you see my hand raised or hear a bell, the procedure is as follows:

1. Freeze.
2. Turn and face me, pay attention, and keep your eyes on me.
3. Be ready for instruction. I will have something to say.

Repeat, and look for class understanding.

Byron, please tell me the procedure when you see my hand raised or hear a bell.

Byron does so.

Yes, yes, yes, thank you, Byron.

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Repeat this with several more students.

Is there anyone who does not understand or know what to do if you see my hand raised or hear a bell?

#2 Rehearse

Good, let's rehearse the procedure.

We will be working together this year, so let's get to know one another. Please look at the people to the right of you. You may have 2 minutes to introduce yourself and get acquainted.

At 2 minutes, hold up your hand and hit the bell, perhaps doing both this first time. Do not say a word. Carry out the procedure exactly as you plan to do it for the rest of the year. Be patient and wait until the class completes the three steps and is paying attention. Do not give up as you wait for the students to give you their undivided attention. Compliment them when you have their attention.

Thank you. You practiced the procedure correctly. Now let's try a different scenario. You will often find yourself out of your seat, working in groups or alone somewhere in the room.

Direct two students to stand at the pencil sharpener, two at the bookcase, and one at the computer. Then hold up your hand, and wait for the students to pay attention.

#3 Reinforce

Thank you. That was the correct procedure for what happens when I hold up my hand or ring the bell. Please do the same thing each time you see my hand raised or hear the bell.

Keep using the same wording if you want the students to practice the same routine.

Beginning Each and Every Day the Right Way

Just as it is easier to get control at the beginning of the year than it is to regain control if you've lost it, it is easier to start each class period with a quiet class than it is to quiet a noisy class. You are far less likely to ever have to worry about discipline problems if your class is continuously occupied. As you can see, a strong, positive start to the school year and the immediate implementation of a few simple procedures provide a structure that can help a teacher have a well-managed classroom. A well-managed classroom gives every student the chance to have one of the best learning experiences of his or her life.