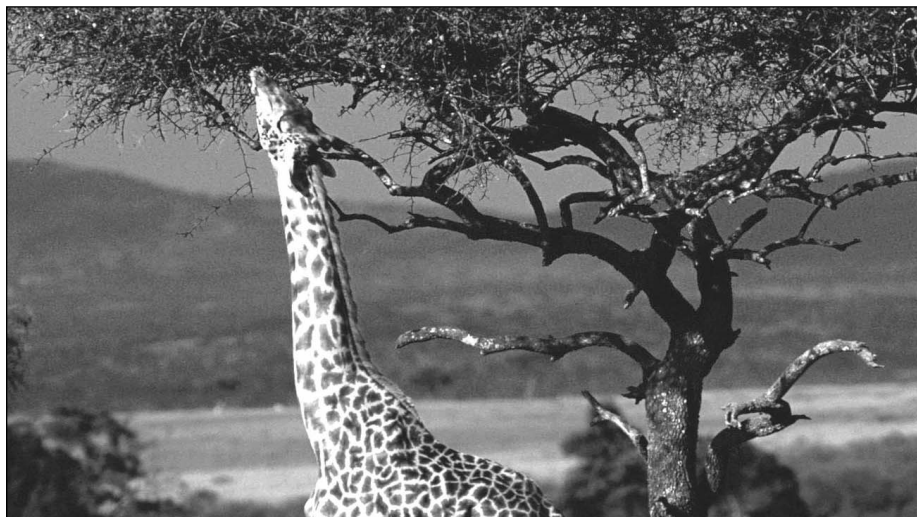


# Better Teaching<sup>®</sup>

## Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement **Elementary** EDITION

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Bringing Lessons to Life

### Teach class about form and function



A giraffe stretches its long neck to reach the tasty leaves of an acacia tree. A kangaroo's pouch is the right shape to hold a developing joey. Throughout the natural world, it's easy to see that there is a connection between form and function.

Understanding the relationship between form and function is one of the "unifying concepts" listed by the National Science Education Standards. It's an idea even young children can understand. Here's a lesson to help children in the primary grades begin to see this important relationship:

1. **Choose pairs of objects**—a knife and spoon, a kitchen towel and a sponge, a paper clip and a money clip.
2. **Have students complete Venn diagrams** on the pairs. How are a knife and spoon alike? (They are both used for eating food.) How

are they different? (One can be used to scoop, the other to cut.)

3. **Have students look at the objects** to see how their form affects their function. Could you cut with a spoon? Yes, but it would take a long time because the edge is round.
4. **Move on to pairs of organisms.** You might show students a cat and a dog, or a bird and a bee. Again help them see how these organisms are the same and different.
5. **Ask questions to help students** think about form and function.

"Look at a duck's feet. These are called webbed feet. How could these feet be useful for a duck that spends a lot of time in the water?"

Over time, your students will start to see the connection between form and function.

**Source:** Kimberly J. Davis and Tracy L. Coskie, "About Form and Function," *Science and Children*, March 2009 (National Science Teachers Association, [www.nsta.org](http://www.nsta.org)).

Connecting With Parents

### For information about students, ask the real experts—their parents



It takes time to get to know your students. Yes, you may be able to learn their names and a few basic facts during the first hectic days of school. But the more in-depth qualities and information—this one is a talented artist, that one adores riddles, a third has a sister in the hospital—are often harder to come by.

Yet this is information that can help you teach each child. If three boys love monster trucks, you can write word problems about monster trucks. If a child is worried about a family member's health, you can share a time when you were in a similar situation.

How can you learn these important facts? Ask the experts! Early in the year, give parents an assignment called "In a Million Words or Fewer." Ask them to tell you things you should know about their child. Non-English speakers can dictate comments to their child.

Teachers say the exercise is invaluable. One realized that she had to teach study skills, since many parents noted their child needed help in that area. Parents also share stories, tips and suggestions about what works—and what doesn't—with their child.

You'll also reach out to parents. "I think the greatest benefit was making that initial contact with parents," one teacher said. "They felt included."

**Source:** Gary Hopkins, "In a Million Words or Fewer," *Education World*, [www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/profdev/profdev080.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev080.shtml).

Setting High Expectations

## Guard against subtle biases



Most teachers are aware of bias as it relates to demographics—for example, assuming that a student from a high-income background will perform better than a student from a low-income background.

But when setting expectations, keep in mind some other, more subtle, biases as well. Remember:

- **Consequences apply** to all students. Strive for uniform, consistent consequences.
- **Grade what you see** in front of you. Do not inflate a grade because the student's history reflects better work than this work shows. Neither should you grade more strictly a piece of work from a student with a less-than-stellar record.
- **Realize you may already know** some of your students' siblings and parents—or even the students themselves. Remind yourself that these associations have no relation (either positive or negative) to the way you treat and evaluate students in your classroom.

**Source:** William Freeman and David Scheidecker, *Becoming a Legendary Teacher: To Instruct and Inspire*, ISBN: 978-1-4129-5481-5 (Corwin Press, [www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)).

Surviving the First Year: Part Three of a Three-Part Series

## Five things to do in your first week of school



The first week of school is a hectic time for teachers and students. But here are five things you can do now to make the rest of your year run more smoothly:

1. **Establish class rules.** Start with your school's or district's behavior guidelines. Use them as a basis for your classroom rules. Remember that students will always try to test the limits on class rules, so be sure any rules you establish are important enough that you are willing to enforce them every time.
2. **Teach procedures.** If you don't set procedures for class routines, you can face chaos in your classroom. Think about all the activities that can disrupt learning—and then teach students how to handle them. From the way they enter your classroom to the way they turn in their homework to the way they check

out library books, show students what you expect.

3. **Learn about your students.** Even as you get to know your students' names, you can also start to assess their abilities. Give interest surveys, reading inventories and basic skill evaluations.

4. **Find in-school support systems.** Find at least one other teacher whom you can turn to for answers to your questions. Get to know the school office staff. Make a friend of the custodian.

5. **Establish practices that promote your own health.** Teaching can be a high-stress job. The first year can be especially challenging. So build time for exercise into your day. Be sure you get enough sleep, too.

**Source:** Kristen Nelson and Kim Lindley, *Starting Strong: Surviving and Thriving as a New Teacher*, ISBN: 1-575-17897-4 (Corwin Press, a Sage Company, [www.corwinpress.com](http://www.corwinpress.com)).

Teaching Social Skills

## Start each day with a respectful handshake



Many classroom management experts recommend that teachers greet students each day by standing at the door, looking directly at each student, and offering a handshake and a warm “hello.” It offers a good way to quickly assess each student. If a teacher notices that one student seems a little down, she can quietly speak to the student later in the day.

But the morning handshake routine is also a great way to teach students respect. Here's how:

- **Inform students** that shaking hands is a way adults greet each other. Knowing how to shake hands properly is an adult skill.
- **Teach students** to look you in the eye as they greet you.

- **Have students practice** firm, confident handshakes.
- **Tell your students**, “When you shake hands in this way, you are showing that you respect the other person. But you are also showing them that you are a person who deserves respect.”

Throughout the year, you can build on this skill. For example:

- **Teach students** how to introduce themselves.
- **Use role-play** to have students practice introducing guests to your class (after they have welcomed them with a warm handshake, of course).

**Source:** Harry and Rosemary Wong, “A First Day of School Script,” [http://teachers.net/wong/MAR03/page\\_2.html](http://teachers.net/wong/MAR03/page_2.html).

# Better Teaching<sup>®</sup>

Classroom Ideas to Improve Student Achievement

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## Building Reading Skills

### Teach students to look for an author's purpose



Even in elementary school, students receive a barrage of information every day.

This only increases in middle and high school. All this information may be useful and helpful. But showing your students how to identify *important* information may be one of the most critical skills you teach them.

Give students these guidelines to determine importance:

- **Let the book or text be a guide.** With older elementary students, books and texts will be divided into chapters and will almost certainly have a Table of Contents. Teach students to always preview the Table of Contents—it is a road map to reading.

Using the Table of Contents, students can get an outline of the

book, an idea of the topics most important to the author—and they can even make predictions.

- **Determine the author's purpose.** Ask students questions like, "Why do you think the author wrote this book?" If students need more guidance, continue with, "Does the author want to teach us something?" "Does he want to make us laugh?"
- **Get more specific** once your class agrees on a purpose. "Okay, so the author wants us to learn about horses. What do you think is more important to the author: the information he gives us about what horses eat or the barn where the horses live?"

**Source:** Divonna M. Stebick, *Comprehension Strategies for Your K-6 Literacy Classroom*, ISBN: 978-1-4129-4043-6 (Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com).

## Resources



*Integrating Science With Mathematics & Literacy* offers

new ways to teach these important subjects. Students can show understanding of science while also exploring, questioning and applying what they learn. Includes learning logs, portfolios and other assessment methods. (Elizabeth Hammerman and Diann Musial, ISBN: 9781-4129-5564-5, Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com.)



Looking for new ways to help students develop phonemic awareness? ReadWrite Think.org's revised Picture Match game offers fun ways to practice using a variety of sounds. The game includes beginning-letter sounds, short vowels and long vowels. The site also includes lesson plans. [www.readwritethink.org/student\\_mat/student\\_material.asp?id=4](http://www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/student_material.asp?id=4).



Visual learners make up more than 60 percent of the population. And even those who learn best by hearing or doing can benefit from highly visual material. Get some good ideas and tap into the love many students have for comic books and graphic novels in Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher's *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using Comic Books, Graphic Novels, Anime, Cartoons and More to Develop Comprehension and Thinking Skills*. (ISBN: 978-1-4129-5312-2, Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com.)

## Establishing Routines

### Routines promote order, eliminate confusion



Successful students and successful classrooms thrive on routines. Students who walk into class knowing what to expect tend to be content, calm and quick to settle down to work.

To set up your class routine:

- **Let students help.** Before the end of the first week of school, gather your students and get their suggestions on best ways to start and end the day.
- **Create two posters together:** "When We Come In" and "Getting Ready to Go Home." On the first poster, list four or five things you want students to do in the first 15 minutes. On the second, list the routine for the last 15 minutes. Most of these ideas

will be yours, but be sure to use ideas from your students, too. ("Say good morning to Mrs. Jones.")

- **Have work ready.** Give a warm-up assignment for the first few minutes or have students read silently.
- **Post the daily schedule** on the board.
- **Establish procedures** for bathroom use, water fountain, etc. It's a good idea to post these, too.
- **Tell students in advance** of major changes, such as an assembly that will mean a shortened academic schedule or if you have a planned absence.

**Source:** Renee Rosenblum-Lowden with Felicia Lowden Kimmel, *You Have to Go to School ... You're the Teacher!* ISBN: 978-1-4129-5122-7 (Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com).

## Share an Idea?

Do you have an idea to improve student learning that should be in this newsletter?

Send your ideas to **Better Teaching**, Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 397, Fairfax Station, VA 22039, fax to 1-800-216-3667 or go to [www.teacher-institute.com/ideas/](http://www.teacher-institute.com/ideas/).

Full credit will be given with each article published. Materials sent cannot be returned.

## Focus : Motivating Students

Behavior Expectations

### Teach students proper line behavior



Teachers want students to form lines throughout the day. If students know how to get in line quickly and quietly, they can get on to the next activity.

This month, teach students exactly what you want them to do when they get in line. Here are some things to remember and practice every day:

- **Every line has a leader.** This is a highly-prized job. Many teachers rotate this job so that everyone can take a turn. Besides the line leader, have someone be the “caboose”—an equally important job.
- **Tell students that no one moves** to the line until you give the signal. At first, dismiss students by rows or tables.
- **Teach students to walk** (not run) to form the line.



Illustration by Bob George

- **Help students practice** being quiet and keeping their hands to themselves while they are in line. Stay where you can see the whole line. Most problems occur when students think they’re invisible to their teacher.

Source: Paul G. Young, *Promoting Positive Behaviors: An Elementary Principal’s Guide to Structuring the Learning Environment*, ISBN: 9781-4129-5303-0 (Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com).

Off to a Good Start

### Connect with each student



Most students want to please and perform well for adults who care about them. Once you establish a connection with your students, they will try to make you proud. Students with this attitude usually have very few behavior problems.

Here’s how you can build a relationship that establishes you as a trusted, caring adult:

- **Learn your students’ names** and use them often. Few things are as important as matching names and faces as quickly as possible. Calling a student by name, coupled with a genuine smile, begins your relationship.
- **Greet students at the door.** Your message will be clear: “I am happy to see you. I am looking forward to our day together.” Students will notice and respond.
- **Look for the gem** in every student. Some students seem to excel in everything—finding and noticing their strengths is easy. With other students, you may have to be a detective—always on the look-out for hidden talents or interests. Notice and nurture these by asking students to tell or show you what they enjoy. Be enthusiastic.

Source: Brian D. Mandler et al, *Strategies for Successful Classroom Management: Helping Students Succeed Without Losing Your Dignity or Sanity*, ISBN: 978-1-4129-3784-9 (Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com).

Effective Classroom Management

### Find keys to successful class management



As a teacher, are you “with it?” Can you “overlap?” No, it’s not slang. Nor are these lyrics from a rap song. It’s research. Literature from the Educational Research Service reveals that being “with it,” and “overlapping” are keys to successful classroom management.

When you’re “with it,” you have your “teacher’s sixth sense.” Like the mother with “eyes in the back of her head,” you can spot a problem in its earliest stages and move in swiftly to head it off.

The best approach is to walk around the room, monitor every

student and look each student in the eye at least once. When students know you’re watching, you’re “with it”—and they behave accordingly.

When you can “overlap,” you’ve mastered a kind of multi-tasking. You can deal with interruptions so smoothly that the quality of your instruction does not suffer. Planning is the key. Plan your lessons so well that getting back to where you were and returning students to task after an interruption is nearly seamless.

Source: Elizabeth Shellard et al., *Effective Classroom Management to Support Student Learning*, ISBN: 1-931762-34-1 (Educational Research Service, www.ers.org).