**How To Be Consistent From The First Day Of School To The Last**

By [Michael Linsin](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/author/jayhawks/) on July 25, 2015 [20](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2015/07/25/how-to-be-consistent-from-the-first-day-of-school-to-the-last/#comments)

There is great freedom in consistency.

Because when you follow [your classroom management plan](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2010/06/26/classroom-management-plan/) to a tee, you remove the guesswork.

You eliminate the stress of lecturing, correcting, and trying to convince your students to behave.

You wipe away the friction and resentment.

The responsibility for misbehavior, then, falls entirely on them—with none of it clinging to you.

Your students are free to reflect on their mistakes, and you’re free to move on as if nothing happened.

**A Slippery Slope**

It’s common for teachers begin the school year determined to be consistent.

But somewhere along the line [they lose their way](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2009/06/03/the-not-so-secret-to-effective-classroom-management/). They get distracted and let minor misbehavior go. They look the other way when crunched for time.

They take misbehavior personally, become angry, and deliver a dressing-down instead.

Before long they’re enforcing rules based on their mood, who the student is, or the severity of the misbehavior rather that what their plan actually says.

Which leads to distrust, animosity, and more and more misbehavior.

Unfortunately, it’s so, so easy to ski down this slippery slope . . . and so, so difficult to find your way back up.

**One Thing**

There is, however, one simple thing you can do on the first day of school to make sure you stay consistent throughout the year.

It’s a strategy that makes following your classroom management plan something you do naturally, even effortlessly.

It becomes automatic, like opening the door when an expected guest knocks or answering the phone when it rings.

It isn’t, however, for the fainthearted, for it entails going on record, making a commitment, and **putting your reputation at stake**.

**The Promise**

The way the strategy works is that on the [very first day of school](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2013/08/10/the-first-day-of-school/), within the first hour, you’re going to make an ironclad promise.

You’re going to make a promise to your class that you will follow your classroom management plan precisely as it’s written. No exceptions.

It will come while you’re introducing your plan and be repeated during every subsequent classroom management lesson as you teach, model, and practice the ins and outs of your rules and consequences.

*“I promise that I will protect your right to learn and love school by following our classroom management plan every time a rule is broken.”*

Pause, look them in the eyes, then say it again.

Keep on saying it every day until doing it becomes second nature to you, until you’ve proven to yourself and your class that you are indeed a person of your word.

**All In**

Teachers are quick to ask students to make promises regarding their behavior, even asking for them to be written out and signed.

But the real power is when the teacher makes a promise.

Because when you publicly state your intention and commitment, you create powerful internal leverage to actually do it.

Even when it’s inconvenient. Even when you’re rushed. Even when the storm of the century is raging outside your classroom door.

By putting yourself on notice and holding yourself accountable for doing what you say you’re going to do, being consistent becomes remarkably easy.

In no time you’ll be someone your students know they can trust and count on—maybe for the first time in their life. You’ll become someone worth looking up to and following and behaving for.

Go all in.

Lay it on the line within the first moments you meet your new class.

And the soft pressure to honor your promise, to do the right thing, to ensure your students the best learning experience they’ve ever had . . .

Will never, ever leave you.

**How A First-Day-Of-School Lesson Can Improve Classroom Management For The Rest Of The Year**

By [Michael Linsin](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/author/jayhawks/) on August 15, 2015 [16](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2015/08/15/how-a-first-day-of-school-lesson-can-improve-classroom-management-for-the-rest-of-the-year/#comments)

There exists a strategy that, if taught on the first day of school, can have a profound effect on the rest of the year.

It takes little if any preparation time.

It’s simple in its directness and also fun and participatory.

But it will shake your students down to the soles of their feet.

It will send the message that yours is no ordinary classroom, that expectations have taken a startling leap skyward . . . that they’re not in Kansas anymore.

You see, one of the best things you can do on [the first day of school](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2013/08/10/the-first-day-of-school/) is set the bar of what is normal far above what your students are used to.

Far above what your colleagues are doing. Far above what most teachers mean when they use the term “high expectations.”

The good news is that you can make this leap in a single lesson. You can rewire your students’ internal understanding of excellence in one short but electric block of time.

It’s a lesson they’ll readily accept without so much as an eye roll because they’ll assume that in your class, your grade level, or your subject area, *it’s just the way things are*.

Furthermore, on the first day of school your students will be more open to change than at any other time during the year.

They’re primed and ready to start fresh, to turn over a new leaf, to put the mistakes and failures of the past behind them.

**How It Works**

The way the strategy works is that you’re going to teach your students a common, everyday routine—like how to enter the classroom in the morning—in a way that is highly, minutely, even obsessively, detailed.

You’re going to teach it in a way that redefines what it means to follow directions and perform at a high level, while at the same time ensuring that every student is successful.

Done right, this new definition of excellence will transfer to every area of classroom management, from behavior to motivation to politeness.

It will establish a standard that will continue for as long as you maintain it.

Teaching this bar-raising strategy entails creating a memory map for your students to follow *every single morning*.

Here’s how:

**You Model**

Borrow a student’s backpack and, while pretending to be an actual member of your class, perform the morning routine precisely how you want your students to do it.

Show purpose, expediency, and concentration as you model your way through the steps you want them to take upon entering your classroom.

This may include hanging up backpacks and jackets, checking mailboxes, organizing personal materials, and displaying or turning in homework. It may include greeting tablemates or reviewing the daily schedule.

It’s smart to *add* details rather than making it too simple.

Challenge is good and will increase concentration, improve memory, and keep your students focused and purpose-driven from the moment they walk through the door.

Extend the routine to the point where they’re either working independently or sitting quietly, facing you, and ready to begin the first lesson.

A specific, well-oiled routine will eliminate morning apathy, irritability, sleepiness, silliness, and the like, ensuring a peaceful rather than stressful start to each day.

It also saves time and allows you to be a *teacher* rather than a [micromanager](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2012/05/26/why-micromanagers-make-bad-teachers/).

**Student Models**

After modeling twice, and asking your students if they have any clarifying questions, choose a single student to model.

Ask them to mimic your actions and movements, and even your focused expressions, in minute detail.

When they finish, calmly praise them for what they did well. Remember, praise is both effective and worthy when students are learning something for the first time.

It provides feedback that further illuminates the path you want them to follow. Having one student model causes the rest to visualize themselves doing it right along with them.

It also proves that it can be done, and done well.

If, however, even one step strays from your initial instruction, then point it out, reteach it, and have the student do it again. It is the smallest details that make the biggest difference.

Done correctly, you should feel as if you’re going overboard in your instruction.

**More Model**

Now call on a few more students to model, one at a time, for the class. Follow them as they go through the steps and movements, nodding along the way.

Use papers, books, umbrellas, laptops, and sweaters as props. Make it as close to the real thing as you can. Again, if corners are cut, ask them to start over again from the beginning.

Have the mindset that you’re only going to teach this particular routine one time. So teach the heck out of it. Get it right and it will set the tone for all routines to follow.

It will set the tone for effort, behavior, and academic performance too.

This doesn’t mean, however, that you’re going to be a demanding ogre. Be sure you teach with a spirit of fun and confidence.

Routines can be drudgery if you drill them like an old football coach.

**All Model**

Once you feel confident your students can do the routine individually, then send your entire class outside with their backpacks to perform the routine simultaneously.

[Emphasize politeness](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2015/04/25/the-easiest-way-to-improve-classroom-behavior/) as they work around each other to hang up hats and maneuver around desks. “Good morning,” “please,” and “excuse me” should be the predominant communication during the opening routine.

You’re only job during this time is to observe, saying as little as possible.

Resist the urge to talk them through the routine—which will weaken rather than strengthen performance and create dependency on you.

Let them do it on their own. Give them a chance to mature and grow and test themselves. It builds confidence and competence, and their body language will show it.

When they finish, if they get it right, be sure and tell them that it’s perfect, that it can’t be done any better. Many teachers are afraid to do this.

They’ve been led to believe that no one ever arrives, that there is always more to learn. But it isn’t true. Once they prove they can do it well, then heartily let them know.

*Note:* Although you’ll want to practice until they get it right, it’s okay to take a break and revisit the routine later in the day—or the next. [Repetition](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2010/08/21/a-forbidden-classroom-management-strategy/), after all, isn’t a bad word.

**It Starts Now**

Teaching a highly detailed routine to perfection on the first day of school is the single best thing you can do to ensure a well-behaved and productive school year.

It sets the standard for every routine, lesson, and activity to follow. It raises the bar of what is normal from mediocrity to excellence.

It sends the message that your new students are now part of something special, something different, something bigger and more important than themselves.

And they’ll love it. It feels good. It fills them with purpose and drive. It motivates and inspires.

It alights a fire of intrinsic motivation to listen, to learn, to behave, and to enjoy being a valued member of your classroom.

You are not every teacher. And yours isn’t any old classroom.

You *can* have the dream class you want. You can have the teaching experience you envisioned when you first decided to become a teacher.

But it starts here.

It starts now.

It starts with this simple 20-minute lesson.



When the school year begins, teachers spend a lot of time getting the classroom ready, planning lessons, and getting to know his/her students. The following list includes 20 ideas that you may not have thought of that can help produce a successful classroom. Each item takes no longer than an hour and can make a big difference throughout the year.

## 1. Set up your classroom in an “active learning” format (15-30 minutes)

Traditional classrooms are normally arranged in a linear format with all the desks facing one direction. [Studies suggest](http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/alc/index.html) that creating a room with no “obvious” front helps students to take a more active role in learning, rather than looking to the teacher.

If your room allows it, arrange the desks in small groups with no obvious front. You can do your instructing from the center of the room instead.

## 2. Stop starting the day with roll call (5 minutes saved)

To get the day off on the right foot, start with an inspirational quote or quiet meditation. Roll call is a tedious necessity, but you shouldn’t have to take up time in your day to do this. The beginning of the day is the most crucial moment for getting off on the right foot. Why not have a sign in sheet when kids walk in? If that doesn’t work, assign a responsible student the task of taking roll while you are doing the morning routine.

## 3. Set up a system for makeup work (30-60 minutes)

With a class size of 16 or more, chances are one or two students will be absent at least a couple times a week. Setting up a system for makeup work ensures you aren’t wasting class time (or your precious after school hours) trying to compile worksheets and assignments. In Harry Wong’s article about [classroom management](http://go.hrw.com/resources/go_sc/gen/HSTPR034.PDF), he gives examples of teachers who designed a bulletin board with envelopes that contained the day’s work.

When a student comes back, they go to the board and take the assignments they missed.

## 4. Define Class Rules (15 minutes)

When the school year begins, take a few minutes out of your day to sit with your students and design the class rules. Students are more likely to follow class protocol when they have been involved with the creation of it. Use positive rules like “speak kindly to one another” rather than “Don’t make fun of other kids.”

Once the rule list is made up (i.e. on poster board), have each student sign the bottom of it like a classroom charter.

## 5. Develop a plan for quieting the class (10 minutes a day for a few days)

How many minutes are wasted trying to get a loud and noisy class to pay attention? The best way to quiet a class is to develop a specific routine from day one. Once you’ve come up with a plan, practice it several times – without further lecture and instruction. For example, if your procedure is to clap twice and raise your hand, do this and wait for as long as it takes until all students are paying attention.

Keep practicing until they’ve gotten it down to a reasonable response time. If you lecture them in the middle of the practice, they will come to expect that.

## 6. Share control with your students (no extra time needed)

Create flexible lesson plans that allow your students some level of control. For example, if your math lesson is about fractions that day, after your fifteen minutes of instruction, provide a list of three different activities they can choose from. Another way to share control is to list the topics for the day and allow them to vote on which topic they would like to tackle first.

The more involved your students are in the learning process, the more likely they are to pay attention and stay motivated.

## 7. Pay attention to noise and light surroundings, which may distract learning (30 minutes)

Teachers only have so many resources and control over the actual classroom structure. Using throw rugs and curtains help to diminish excess noise from hallways or in the room. If you have a reading area, why not set up a table lamp from home for more cozy lighting? It may not seem like much, but [**learning spaces**](http://www.teachthought.com/teaching/20-things-educators-need-to-know-about-learning-spaces/) play a big role in a student’s ability to concentrate.

Do you or your parents have any old furniture at home? Adding a chair or couch to a silent reading area will greatly enhance your student’s willingness!

## 8. Deal with smartphones (10 minutes)

Whether you like it or not, smartphones are working into younger and younger hands. Some schools may have a ban on smartphones altogether, but if your school does not, consider creating a plan that uses smartphones in the classroom. Banning them will only give you a headache as you spend hours trying to referee, confiscate, and deal with unruly students. Who wants to waste time doing that?

Why not create a smartphone area in your classroom? Everyone must put his or her smartphone there at the beginning of the day. For five minutes before lunch or after work is finished, they can go over to that area and use it for research or educational gaming. When you work with your students, you might find they are more apt to compromise as well.

## 9. Create a list of “question words” that help you with effective questioning (10 minutes)

Create a board or poster with excellent words to use in questioning your students. These words can be used not only for instructing, but when students are asked to question each other. [The NDT Resource center](http://www.ndt-ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/Effective_Questioning.htm) has an effective list of words to remember.

## 10. Involve students in the development of their classroom look and feel (10 minutes)

There is a lot of pressure on that first day of school to have everything looking colorful and sparkly. Rather than using your classroom preparation time to decorate bulletin boards, create a board for each group of desks in the class. Post a note that says, “To be designed by group….” and on the first day of school explain that each handful of students will be required to decorate and design a board throughout the year.

Perhaps you’ll have a contest every quarter or some theme they must work within as they display their work. Not only does it create a fun group assignment, it is a great way for kids to take pride in their work. Get your students into the activity by assigning team names for each group.

## Action #11 Create a risk reward procedure to encourage kids to not fear mistakes (15 minutes)

Creating a safe learning environment takes some work. Students will be more apt to risk mistakes or error if they know that you are not just looking for the right answer, but for students who are actively involved. Create a risk reward protocol that recognizes those students who go out on a limb to answer a tough question, even when they are wrong. It can be as simple as pinning a student’s name to the blackboard to recognize his or her willingness to try on any given day.

When you reward a student’s willingness to be wrong in front of the class, you level the playing field between gifted students and the ones that struggle to keep up. Click here to learn more about the value of mistakes.

## Action #12 Make a daily evaluation sheet for your students (30 minutes)

It takes a bit of work to create an effective evaluation sheet, but once it’s done, you have a valuable tool to use throughout the year. Each day, your students can quickly evaluate how they felt the day went- in terms of assignments, lessons, effort, and behavior. This sort of self-evaluation engages them to look closely at their own progress.

It also gives you a sense of how accurately they perceive their learning and the ability to intervene if necessary.

## Action #13 Create a corner of the room for personal needs (30 minutes)

Kids don’t stop being kids once they enter the classroom. I remember how distracted I was in the winter when I would have chapped lips or a stuffy nose. Perhaps you can have a small bin for each student to fill with Band-Aids, chapstick, tissues, etc. This way, they can easily get on with their day even when they might be feeling less than 100%.

Having an individual container ensures no one is cross-contaminating each other. You may think, “But that is for the school nurse!” Check out my article on the [importance of teaching holistically.](http://newsroom.opencolleges.edu.au/trends/holistic-teaching-20-reasons-why-educators-should-consider-a-students-emotional-well-being/)

## Action #14 Assign a videographer of the day to take a few minutes of footage of learning (30 minutes)

Why would you need footage of your classroom? Because it is a fantastic way to give your students feedback without having to say a word! Use a smartphone and assign a student the task of recording a lesson, group work, or presentation. At the end of the week, your students can watch themselves in the “act” of learning.

If you have kids who struggle to pay attention, it’ll be perfectly obvious on the footage without you having to say a word. Then, at the end of the year, you can make a montage of your class. It’ll be a cherished memory for them- and you.

## Action #15 Start a reference collection area (1 hour)

Most classrooms have an area dedicated for books right? How about adding to that an area for kids to post their notes or study sheets? This works best for older students, but if you have the option for a small printer/copier in your room, put it near a bulletin board and allow students to make copies of their study guides and notes and post them for other kids to use. It’s just another way for your class to take pride in their work and foster a community of help and support.

## Action #16 [Peer-to-Peer support](http://www.agilantlearning.com/pdf/Blended%20Learning%20Design.pdf) and accountability (30 minutes)

Students do well when they have input from both an instructor and their peers. At the beginning of the year, assign peer-to-peer support teams of two. Throughout the school season, these two people can help with correcting homework, providing feedback and support, and that occasional accountability.

When you feel like you can’t get through to your student, a peer just might.

## Action #17 Set up a teacher blog or online portal for communication with parents (1 hour)

Some schools have great content management systems that give teachers a place to connect with students and parents. Utilize these resources as much as possible. However if you don’t have that option, you can set up a free blog on WordPress to journal classroom progress and events. Parents can then subscribe to the blog and get updates about important happenings.

Since a blog is public, this is a place to showcase the class work, not to discuss private matters like discipline or grades.

## Action #18 Assign student jobs in the classroom (30 minutes)

This goes along with shared control. Each student should have a job in the class. Typical student jobs include erasing blackboards, sharpening pencils, passing out papers, etc., but think a bit outside the box. Why not assign a student to take attendance, collect makeup work for the absent students, grade homework, or even teach a lesson?

Assigning some instructive roles to your top students will not only increase their aptitude, it gives the other students a chance to hear from a different perspective. Finally, one of the best places to test someone’s knowledge of an area is to have him or her teach it.

## Action #19 Enlist parent help (30 minutes)

Do you have parents who work in interesting professions? Perhaps a doctor, musician, or journalist? During your back to school evening with your students’ parents, pass around a signup sheet asking them to commit to coming into the classroom to talk about their career. If that isn’t possible, maybe you can set up a Skype session so the students can interact with him/her online?

The ultimate goal of school is to prepare children to be effective members of society. Get them excited about work early!

## Action #20 Administer a learning styles assessment (60 minutes)

At the beginning of the year, you have a classroom of students that are virtually strangers. The time you take at the beginning to understand [how they learn is not wasted](http://newsroom.opencolleges.edu.au/features/educational-psychology-20-things-educators-need-to-know-about-how-students-learn/). Try out Diane Heacox’s book called [Differentiating Instruction in the Regular Classroom](http://www.amazon.com/Differentiating-Instruction-Regular-Classroom-Learners/dp/1575421054) for ideas about how to test your students’ preferences.

This is a syndicated cross-post from [*opencolleges.edu.au*](http://newsroom.opencolleges.edu.au/features/20-quick-actions-you-can-do-today-to-set-your-classroom-up-for-massive-success/#ixzz2OV8jNhgJ)