



Your Classroom Management Plan (2)

Routines

“Look to make your course regular, that men may know beforehand what they may expect.”

Francis Bacon

The airline industry has spared no expense to ensure passenger safety and puts systems and routines in place to prevent, and respond to, virtually any emergency situation. Whenever a certain warning light flashes on his instrument panel the pilot responds with the relevant procedure in order to avert a potential disaster and the highly trained crew follow the routines to the letter. For each and every situation there is a pre-planned, specific series of instructions for both the pilot and crew to turn to; potential problems are either swiftly de-escalated or avoided completely and the smooth running of the aircraft continues with the passengers' comfort and enjoyment barely being disturbed.

What would happen if the safety routines weren't present? What would commercial air travel be like if the pilot wasn't prepared, had no plans in place for averting problems and instead tried to sort them out after they had become firmly established? You guessed it...a very traumatic and messy affair for all concerned.

This is the way many teachers manage their classrooms.

Staffrooms and online teaching forums resonate with pleas of “What do I do with this student?” “How do I get them quiet?” “What do I do when they ignore me?” “How do I get them to sit properly?”

The reason so many teachers feel they have no control is because they are concerned with sorting problems out *after* the event has happened – they are operating from a 'reactive' point of view, effectively *waiting* for problems to occur and then *reacting* to them with the best course of action they can think of at that particular moment. When thoughts and judgements are clouded with frustration and stress, our best course of action isn't always *the* best course of action – just like the out-of-control aircraft, things can become traumatic and messy.

When teachers focus on PREVENTING problems instead of reacting to them, school life becomes much easier. Routines are one of the best preventive tools you can use.

Routines hone down our broad rules into specific step-by-step plans and make them applicable to an almost unlimited range of activities and situations. They make classrooms run smoothly, allow activities and tasks to be accomplished efficiently and eliminate the problems normally associated with transition times and other hotspots.

And pupils LIKE routines too – simply because they make it easy for them to succeed in school by showing them exactly how to do things right. The classroom will run smoothly and your job will be much easier when pupils know exactly *what* to do and *how* to do it.

Give them a destination, a map and a clear set of directions and there is more chance of them getting where they are supposed to be.

Routines *teach* the behaviour we want to see in our pupils, it gives them tracks to walk in and a map to follow. And because this map is repeated over and over again and doesn't change, it creates total consistency for both teacher and pupil.

Routines are the most effective, time-saving device any teacher can use. **Routines automate classroom management and make rules easy to follow.**

How do routines work?

Routines provide the link between the teacher's picture of good behaviour and the pupils' interpretation of that picture. They let the pupil know *exactly* what they have to do to succeed. Let me show you what I mean with this simple example. Let's assume the end of a lesson is approaching.....

The teacher knows exactly what she wants the pupils to do – she wants them to get cleared away as quickly as possible. So she gives the instruction to do so.

Question: Which of these instructions is going to give her the greatest chance of success?

- a) "The bell is about to go put everything away and get ready to be dismissed."
- b) "The bell is going to go in 5 minutes, it's time to clear away. You know what to do. The teacher then points to a clearly displayed routine at the front of the room...."

End of Lesson

- *Put textbooks on the shelf and exercise books on my desk*
- *Put all equipment where you got it from*
- *Clear your work area and sit silently facing the front*
- *After you get permission to leave, push in your chair and leave in silence.*
- *If it is the last period of the day, stack the chairs by the back wall.*

The answer is obvious. The first command is going to lead to chaos. Pupils hearing this type of vague instruction often don't give the teacher what she wants because they don't *know* what she wants – she hasn't given them a clear enough map. Some of the pupils will be mature enough to act appropriately and do their best to clear away and wait quietly to be dismissed. Others will take advantage and waste time, fool around or stand chatting.

The end result will see the teacher becoming increasingly frustrated as time ticks by and pupils don't do what she wants. She will find herself repeating instructions, shouting, yelling and having to deal with progressively more problems from pupils who are not engaged. When our more energetic or

challenging pupils aren't given specific instructions or tasks to do, they wander, play dumb and find something else to occupy them. This makes the simple task of 'clearing away' at the end of a lesson suddenly turn into the time-consuming and stressful task of dealing with multiple behaviour issues.

The second command works because this teacher has spent time teaching a routine for 'end of the lesson'. There is no need for confusion or wasted time. No need to repeat instructions, no need to check that everyone has understood and give extra prompts to those who haven't – *everyone knows exactly what to do*.

How do you set up routines?

The short answer is that you teach them one at a time until they become *habitual* and the key to their success lies in that last word. You have to spend time teaching routines – possibly a couple of weeks on each one depending on the class. And you have to continually re-visit them, practice them and reinforce them. A little two minute reminder on three or four of your routines is all that's needed at the start of a lesson but it still must be done to keep your routines fresh in their minds.

Yes, there is effort involved, but when you compare that with the alternative – spending every lesson getting stressed out continually having to tell pupils what to do – it's time well spent.

So, think of all the transitions and activities, and hotspots which cause you problems throughout your teaching day; in fact, don't bother, we know what they are:

- Entering classroom
- Distributing materials
- Clearing materials
- Asking for help
- Transition between activities or tasks
- What to do when you've finished your task
- What to do when you're late
- Using certain equipment
- Group work
- Answering questions
- Handing in work
- Leaving classroom.

How much easier would your teaching day be if you had routines in place for all those difficult times? How much smoother would the lesson be if pupils knew exactly what to do in each of those circumstances?

The key is to make LOTS of routines – as many as you need. Teach them, practice them, make them habitual and post them up on the walls as reminders so that next time a pupil isn't doing as he should you can calmly say...“What should you be doing?” and point at the routine.

Your classroom management is now automated.

Incidentally, if you want a complete set of pre-written routines on PowerPoint please visit www.behaviourneeds.com and sign up for our free classroom-management mini-course. ☺