Building Blocks of Effective Instruction

Good classroom instruction is no accident. Two powerful tools for analyzing the quality of student instruction are the Instructional Hierarchy and the Learn Unit.

**Instructional Hierarchy.** As students are taught new academic skills, they go through a series of predictable learning stages. At the start, a student is usually halting and uncertain as he or she tries to use the target skill. With teacher feedback and lots of practice, the student becomes more fluent, accurate, and confident in using the skill. It can be very useful to think of these phases of learning as a hierarchy (See chart on page 2). The learning hierarchy (Haring, Lovitt, Eaton, & Hansen, 1978) has four stages: acquisition, fluency, generalization, and adaptation:

1. **Acquisition.** The student has begun to learn how to complete the target skill correctly but is not yet accurate or fluent in the skill. The goal in this phase is to improve accuracy.
2. **Fluency.** The student is able to complete the target skill accurately but works slowly. The goal of this phase is to increase the student's speed of responding (fluency).
3. **Generalization.** The student is accurate and fluent in using the target skill but does not typically use it in different situations or settings. Or the student may confuse the target skill with ‘similar’ skills. The goal of this phase is to get the student to use the skill in the widest possible range of settings and situations, or to accurately discriminate between the target skill and ‘similar’ skills.
4. **Adaptation.** The student is accurate and fluent in using the skill. He or she also uses the skill in many situations or settings. However, the student is not yet able to modify or adapt the skill to fit novel task-demands or situations.

**The ‘Learn Unit’.** At the core of good instruction lies the “Learn Unit”, a 3-step process in which the student is invited to engage in an academic task, delivers a response, and then receives immediate feedback about how he or she did on the task (Heward, 1996). Here is an explanation of the stages of the ‘Learn Unit’:

1. **Academic Opportunity to Respond.** The student is presented with a meaningful opportunity to respond to an academic task. A question posed by the teacher, a math word problem, and a spelling item on an educational computer ‘Word Gobbler’ game could all be considered academic opportunities to respond.
2. **Active Student Response.** The student answers the item, solves the problem presented, or completes the academic task. Answering the teacher’s question, computing the answer to a math word problem (and showing all work), and typing in the correct spelling of an item when playing an educational computer game are all examples of active student responding.
3. **Performance Feedback.** The student receives timely feedback about whether his or her response is correct—often with praise and encouragement. A teacher exclaiming ‘Right! Good job!’ when a student gives an response in class, a student using an answer key to check her answer to a math word problem, and a computer message that says ‘Congratulations! You get 2 points for correctly spelling this word!’ are all examples of corrective feedback.

The more frequently a student cycles through complete ‘Learn Unit’ trials, the faster that student is likely to make learning progress. If any one of these steps is missing, the quality of instruction will probably be compromised.

**References**


### Instructional Hierarchy: Matching Interventions to Student Learning Stage (Haring, et al., 1978)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Stage</th>
<th>Student 'Look-Fors'…</th>
<th>What strategies are effective…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Acquisition:** Exit Goal: The student can perform the skill accurately with little adult support. | • Is just beginning to learn skill  
• Not yet able to perform learning task reliably or with high level of accuracy | • Teacher actively demonstrates target skill  
• Teacher uses ‘think-aloud’ strategy—especially for thinking skills that are otherwise covert  
• Student has models of correct performance to consult as needed (e.g., correctly completed math problems on board)  
• Student gets feedback about correct performance  
• Student receives praise, encouragement for effort |
| **Fluency:** Exit Goals: The student (a) has learned skill well enough to retain (b) has learned skill well enough to combine with other skills, (c) is as fluent as peers. | • Gives accurate responses to learning task  
• Performs learning task slowly, haltingly | • Teacher structures learning activities to give student opportunity for active (observable) responding  
• Student has frequent opportunities to drill (direct repetition of target skill) and practice (blending target skill with other skills to solve problems)  
• Student gets feedback on fluency and accuracy of performance  
• Student receives praise, encouragement for increased fluency |
| **Generalization:** Exit Goals: The student (a) uses the skill across settings, situations; (b) does not confuse target skill with similar skills | • Is accurate and fluent in responding  
• May fail to apply skill to new situations, settings  
• May confuse target skill with similar skills (e.g., confusing ‘+’ and ‘x’ number operation signs) | • Teacher structures academic tasks to require that the student use the target skill regularly in assignments.  
• Student receives encouragement, praise, reinforcers for using skill in new settings, situations  
• If student confuses target skill with similar skill(s), the student is given practice items that force him/her to correctly discriminate between similar skills  
• Teacher works with parents to identify tasks that the student can do outside of school to practice target skill  
• Student gets periodic opportunities to review, practice target skill to ensure maintenance |
| **Adaptation:** Exit Goal: The Adaptation phase is continuous and has no exit criteria. | • Is fluent and accurate in skill  
• Applies skill in novel situations, settings without prompting  
• Does not yet modify skill as needed to fit new situations (e.g., child says ‘Thank you’ in all situations, does not use modified, equivalent phrases such as “I appreciate your help.”) | • Teacher helps student to articulate the ‘big ideas’ or core element(s) of target skill that the student can modify to face novel tasks, situations (e.g., fractions, ratios, and percentages link to the ‘big idea’ of the part in relation to the whole; ‘Thank you’ is part of a larger class of polite speech)  
• Train for adaptation: Student gets opportunities to practice the target skill with modest modifications in new situations, settings with encouragement, corrective feedback, praise, other reinforcers  
• Encourage student to set own goals for adapting skill to new and challenging situations. |
The student does not participate in large-group discussions (p.4)

The student does not have a regular routine (fixed time, location, etc.) for studying and completing homework (p.9)

The student lacks an efficient strategy for completing homework assignments (p.9)

The student completes homework but fails to turn it in at school (p.9)

The student does not write down homework assignments correctly or completely (p.8)

The student fails to take work materials home that are required for his/her homework assignment (p.8)

The student fails to take work materials home that are required for his/her homework assignment (p.8)

The student takes poor or incomplete notes on lecture content (p.5)

The student is unfocused and inattentive in class (p.6)

The student is unfocused and inattentive in class (p.6)

The student completes classwork quickly without attention to quality (p.4)

The student does not get to class on time (p.2)

The student does not consistently bring necessary work materials to class (p.2)

The student refuses to comply with teacher requests to do work (p.6)

The student seeks help from others even when he or she can do the work (p.7)

The student does not ask for peer or teacher assistance, even when he/she clearly needs help (p.7)

The student completes classwork quickly without attention to quality (p.4)

The student appears unmotivated to complete in-class work (p.3)

The student appears unable to complete in-class work (p.3)

The student does not participate in large-group discussions (p.4)

The student completes classwork quickly without attention to quality (p.4)

The student refuses to comply with teacher requests to do work (p.6)
Classwork & Homework: Troubleshooting Student Problems From Start to Finish

There are a thousand small ways that students can drift into academic trouble: by regularly showing up late for class, for example, or not writing down their homework assignments accurately. Teachers know, however, that such small problems can rapidly snowball into more serious academic difficulties, resulting in reduced test scores and lower course grades, and disciplinary office referrals.

This handout lists common stumbling blocks that can prevent students from fully understanding material taught to them or from completing work assignments. Practical solutions are offered to overcome each potential stumbling block. Educators can adapt the majority of these intervention ideas to include in Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 Accommodation Plans.

1. The student does not get to class on time.
   - Provide an incentive for arriving promptly (e.g., points toward earning a reward or privilege).
   - Set up fun, short ‘bellringer’ activities before class to motivate students to show up on time.
   - Establish a classwide reward system in which students ‘clock in’ (record their arrival time) as they enter the classroom. The teacher sets a cumulative time goal (e.g. 6 hours). Students who arrive early contribute the number of minutes between their arrival and the beginning of instruction to the growing class total. Students arriving late have the number of minutes that they were late subtracted from the class total. Once the class total matches the teacher’s pre-set time goal, the entire class takes part in a desirable activity (such as watching a movie or having a pizza party).
   - Require tardy students to ‘make up’ missed class time (e.g., being required to stay after school or complete extra assignments) if they lack a valid excuse for being late.
   - Start a school-home note system to communicate with parents about student's arrival time, classroom attendance, and overall performance.
   - Make sure that other teachers are releasing their classes on time to allow students adequate time to get to your classroom.

2. The student does not consistently bring necessary work materials to class
   - Remind students at the end of class about the books or other work materials that they should bring to the next class session.
   - Keep a collection of pens, pencils, and writing paper in the room that students can use if they forget their own.
   - Send parents a list of the essential materials that students should always bring to your class. Encourage parents to check with their child before school to ensure that he or she has all necessary work items.
   - Teach the class a general system for organizing work and storing materials. Students should have an organizer with a section for every subject. Each section should include a calendar to record assignments, and space to store...
work in progress. The organizer should also be stocked with pens, pencils, and writing paper.

- Pair each student with a 'peer buddy'. Direct students to share with, or borrow from, their peer buddy if they forget a book, pencil, or other item. Also, have student pairs check with each other at the end of class to ensure that each has written down all assignments correctly and has the necessary study materials needed for homework.

- Have the student use a simple self-monitoring system. At the end of class each day, the student answers one question: “Did I have all necessary materials in class to do the work expected of me?” Offer the student an incentive (e.g., privilege, extra-credit points toward a grade, etc.) if he or she is able to answer ‘YES’ to the self-monitoring question a certain number of times per week. (For students with very poor organizational skills, you may start with an easy-to-achieve goal—say 2 YES ratings pre week. As the student shows improvement, raise to bar to 3, then 4, and eventually 5 YES ratings per week. Also, spot-check the student’s rating periodically to make sure that the student is being honest in his or her ratings.)

- Assign one staff member at your school to manage a caseload of students who are organizationally challenged. At the start of each day, that staff member ‘checks in’ with these students before they go to class. This person can quickly check students’ schedules for the day and make sure that they have all necessary work materials. If a student is missing an important item, the check-in person should help that student to secure the missing item before class.

3. The student appears unmotivated to complete in-class work.

- Survey the student’s academic skills to make sure that the student does not have skill deficits that he or she is hiding behind a mask of poor motivation.

- Offer the student the opportunity to earn points or tokens toward rewards or incentives by completing a certain amount of schoolwork. Review possible rewards with the student and allow him or her to choose those that he or she would find most motivating.

- Use cooperative learning activities to teach course content. Cooperative learning allows students to learn while also getting motivating social reinforcement through interaction with their peers.

- Weave high-interest topics into lessons to capture and hold student attention. To learn what topics most interest your students, just ask them (whether through class discussions, written surveys, or individual student-teacher conversations).

- Offer the student choices in how he or she structures his or her learning experience in the classroom. For example, consider allowing students to select where they sit, who they sit with, what books they use for an assignment, or the type of product that they agree to produce (e.g., offering the option to students in a writing course of composing an opinion essay, a newspaper article, or letter to the editor).

- Give students a voice in structuring the lesson. For example, you might have the class vote on whether they wish to spend a class period working in student pairs at the computer center reviewing course content posted on an Internet site or remaining in the classroom working in larger student groups to pull out key course concepts from the textbook.

4. The student appears unable to complete in-class work.

- Survey the student’s academic skills to determine where his or her skill deficits lie.
Adjust the student's classroom instruction to match his or her skill level. For example, a student who struggles in a higher reading group might be placed in a lower group.

Give the student review sheets with completed models that demonstrate all steps of the learning strategy that he or she must use to do the assignment. Take care to write the review sheets so that the student is able to grasp the essential elements of the strategy when reviewing it independently.

Link the student with a classmate, an older student, or an adult volunteer who can tutor the student in the area(s) of academic weakness. (Be sure that the student and tutor spend the majority of tutoring time actively working on the targeted skills rather than engaging in social conversation!)

Provide the student with materials at his or her ability level on which the student can practice, practice, practice key skills being taught in the course. If the student is working independently on practice materials, provide the student with answer keys so that the student can rapidly check his or her work.

Provide the student with study aids and reference materials designed to increase his or her comprehension of course material, such as guided notes and glossaries containing key course terms and their definitions.

5. The student completes classwork quickly without attention to quality.

Select assignments that have high-interest 'real world' application for students to encourage their best effort. For example, have students write an autobiographical essay that can later be submitted as part of their application for a summer job.

Create a 'quality rubric that lists the key dimensions of quality that you expect from the student's work. Require that the student rate all classwork using the rubric. Do not allow the student to hand in work until the student is able honestly to assign him- or herself the highest ratings possible. (NOTE: You can use this technique with one student or the entire class.)

Divide students into pairs and have them exchange their completed assignments. Instruct students to rate the quality of their peer's work and to share their written evaluations with each other. Before collecting work, encourage students to make changes to their own assignments in response to peer editorial feedback.

To avoid having students rush through an assignment so that they can have free time, give additional classwork to anyone done early.

Occasionally surprise students by inviting 'guest reviewers' from outside the classroom (e.g., another teacher, principal, visitor from outside the school) to look at important student assignments and provide face-to-face feedback about the quality of the work.

6. The student does not participate in large-group discussions.

Make sure that students are not permitted to tease or mock their peers for giving an incorrect answer in your classroom. Students should feel safe to make mistakes—even in public—as they strive to master difficult course material and concepts.

Let students know that a certain percentage of their course grade will be determined by their preparation for class discussion and willingness to participate in class.

Write all student names onto index cards or slips of paper and place those names into a container. During class discussion, pose a question and give students a short period of 'think time'. At the end of that time, draw a name from the container and call on that
student to attempt an answer. Then replace the student’s name in the container and pose another question. (If you have students who are very shy about participating, you may allow them to pass if they do not know the answer when called on.)

- Meet with the student privately and give him or her a passage from the course text (or other relevant material). Provide the student with discussion questions that you plan to ask him or her in the next class session and let the student know that the answers to those questions are to be found in the passage. (If the student requires additional support, underline the portions of the passages where answers to the discussion questions are to be found.)

- Permit students who do not know the answer when called on to select a ‘lifeline’, a peer who they believe will know the correct answer. If a student uses a lifeline, however, do not accept the answer until the student using the lifeline states whether he or she judges the lifeline’s answer to be correct.

- Allow students to consult their notes and the course text when responding to a discussion question.

- Have the student use a simple self-monitoring system. With the student, set a reasonable daily goal for responding to discussion questions (e.g., “In each class, I will raise my hand to answer at least 3 questions.”) At the end of class, the student marks on a sheet how many times the student actually participated in discussion. If the student meets or exceeds the daily goal, the student is awarded a point or token that can be redeemed later for an incentive. Of course, the teacher should spot-check the student’s rating periodically to make sure that the student is being honest in his or her ratings.

7. The student takes poor or incomplete notes on lecture content.

- Base part of the course grade on the quality of the student’s notes. Periodically collect student notes to grade and provide written feedback, doing so more frequently near the start of the school year. (NOTE: If you decide to grade student notes, be sure first to provide students who have disabilities that impact note-taking with appropriate accommodations, such as those discussed below.)

- Provide sets of ‘guided notes’ to students (notes which contain main headings and some key information but leave blanks where the student is to write in additional information).

- Keep a master set of teacher course notes available for students to borrow to check against their own notes. Or get the permission of a student in the class with good note-taking skills to photocopy his or her notes and make them available (e.g., with weekly updates) for other students to review.

- When covering important material in a course lecture, explicitly prompt students to write it down.

- Allow students to audiotape lectures. Or get into the routine of recording your own lectures and allow students to sign out those audiotapes for review.

- Encourage students to join study groups (e.g., in study halls, after school) to prepare for quizzes and tests. In these groups, students can compare notes, increasing the likelihood that students with poor note-taking abilities will fill in gaps in their own notes while reviewing essential course content.

- Work with the class to create a rubric for judging the quality of course notes. Periodically have students exchange notebooks and give structured feedback to each other about the quality of their note-taking. Require that students write up their feedback and share a copy
with you. Use that feedback to flag students who are regularly rated as poor note-takers; spend time with them reviewing effective note-taking strategies.

8. The student is unfocused and inattentive in class.
   - Seat the student near you in your teaching ‘action zone’, the section of the room that you tend to face most often when addressing the class.
   - When giving individual instructions to--or making a request of--the student, first make eye contact, call the student's name, and be sure that he or she is clearly attending to you.
   - Post a daily agenda on the board describing the main activities planned for the class. Include the approximate amount of time that each activity will require. Preview this agenda with the class before beginning instruction. Keep the agenda on the board through the entire class period.
   - Break longer assignments down into smaller ‘chunks’ or sections. Allow the student the option of taking a short break after successfully completing each section.
   - Before the student begins an independent assignment, have the student describe his or her work plan out loud for you. Tell the student that you plan to check in with him or her at the end of class to see what progress the student has made toward accomplishing his or her work goals.
   - Teach at a brisk pace that is more likely to hold students’ attention.
   - Provide a quiet, less-distracting corner study space (e.g. study carrel) in a less-frequented section of the classroom where the student can go when he or she needs to concentrate on independent work.
   - Seat the student next to an accepting classmate with good work habits. Teach the student how quietly to ask the classmate for help whenever the student becomes confused or unsure about a class activity.

9. The student refuses to comply with teacher requests to do work.
   - Survey the student's academic skills to make sure that the student does not have skill deficits that he or she is hiding behind a mask of non-compliance or defiance.
   - Use strategies to boost student motivation to learn (see ideas listed in section 3).
   - When giving individual instructions to--or making a request of--the student, first make eye contact, call the student's name, and be sure that he or she is clearly attending to you.
   - When interacting with the student, keep it positive. Attempt to have at least 3 positive interactions with the student (e.g., greeting the student, praising his or her behavior, acknowledging a correct answer) for each negative interaction (e.g., reprimand).
   - Create a reward program that allows the student to earn points or tokens toward incentives or privileges for complying with adult requests. First, set a percentage goal for student compliance. (For example, if the student typically complies with only 50% of your requests, you might set an initial goal for improvement of 70% compliance.) Meet with the student before starting the program to teach the student your definition of compliance (e.g., “The student carried out the teacher request within 20 seconds without complaining”). Inform the student that, for those periods during the day when a behavior program is in effect, the student can earn a point or token if he or she complies with teacher requests at or above the pre-set goal. The points or tokens can be redeemed periodically for rewards or privileges.
Create a list of fair and appropriate consequences to be imposed whenever students refuse to comply with teacher requests. Explain to the class in advance what these consequences are and take care to be consistent in imposing them whenever a student fails to comply. (If possible, develop a series of consequences for misbehavior that can be delivered in the classroom, rather than simply sending the student to the principal's office at the first sign of defiance.) Teachers should note that providing only negative consequences when a chronically defiant student misbehaves is unlikely to work very well. Chances for success increase when negative consequences for misbehavior are paired with a reward system for positive student behavior.

10. The student seeks help from others even when he or she can do the work.
   - When the student asks for assistance unnecessarily, direct the student to attempt the problem or work on his or her own. Keep the interaction brief and business-like.
   - Reinforce the student for working independently: Approach the student at random intervals whenever he or she is engaged in work and give the student encouragement (for example, by briefly praising the student for effort).
   - Meet with the student to generate a list of strategies that the student can use independently when he or she has problems with seatwork. Strategies might include referring to a model that demonstrates how to solve the problem type, referring to notes or the course text, or consulting reference resources such as dictionaries, glossaries, or maps to find an answer. Whenever the student approaches you for assistance, have the student first describe independent strategies he or she has already tried before giving the student assistance.
   - Create a 'memory-friendly' classroom by publicly posting essential information (on the board or as posters) that students are likely to need for reference (e.g., the daily class schedule or agenda, in-class assignments, step-by-step breakdown of strategies for completing academic problems). When a student asks for assistance, point to the appropriate information resource and direct the student to find the answer on his or her own.

11. The student does not ask for peer or teacher assistance, even when he/she clearly needs help.
   - Give the student a private signal to indicate the need for teacher assistance. For example, provide the student with a red folder ('help folder') containing practice worksheets. Meet privately with the student and tell the student that, whenever he or she is stuck and needs assistance on independent assignments, the student should pull out the folder and begin working on practice worksheets until the teacher can provide assistance. Monitor the room during seatwork; whenever you note the student working out of the red 'help folder' approach the student in a low-key manner to offer assistance.
   - Give the student review sheets with completed models that demonstrate all steps of the learning strategy that he or she must use to do the assignment. Format the review sheets so that the student is able to grasp the content while working independently. Direct the student to attempt to resolve problems with seatwork by first referring to the completed models.
   - Create a 'memory-friendly' classroom by publicly posting essential information (on the board or as posters) that students are likely to need for reference (e.g., the daily class schedule or agenda, in-class assignments, step-by-step breakdown of strategies for completing academic problems).
schedule or agenda, in-class assignments, step-by-step breakdown of strategies for completing academic problems). Coach the student to consult the appropriate memory aid (e.g., posted academic strategies) whenever he or she needs assistance.

- Allow students to complete seatwork assignments in pairs or small groups. Encourage them to ask each other for assistance as needed.
- Approach the student privately during seatwork. In a supportive manner, encourage the student to demonstrate ('think aloud') the strategy that he or she is using to complete the assignment. Correct the student if he or she is using the strategy in a faulty manner. Be sure to praise the student for effort.
- Meet with the student privately and together brainstorm a list of strategies that the student would be willing to use to get assistance during independent work. For example, the student may agree to first refer to his or her notes, then ask a peer, and as a last resort approach the teacher for help. Write up the student’s ‘help steps’ as a checklist and remind the student to use these steps whenever seatwork is assigned.

12. The student does not write down homework assignments correctly or completely.

- Type up all class assignments for the week or month and pass out to the class.
- Set up a ‘homework hotline’ that students (and parents!) can call with a pre-recorded message listing current class assignments. Or create and regularly update a web page that students can visit to browse a listing of pending assignments and their due dates.
- Pair off students. At the end of each class, instruct students briefly to check each other’s organizers or notebooks to ensure that each has accurately and completely recorded assignments from the board.
- Instruct the student to approach you at the end of each class period with his or her organizer or notebook. Read over the student’s listing of assigned work. If the student’s recording of the assignment is incomplete or incorrect, prompt him or her to write it correctly. Then initial the assignment page.
- Select a staff member (e.g., vice principal, reading teacher, counselor) who can serve as a ‘check out’ person at the end of the school day. Assign that staff member a caseload of students who have chronic difficulties accurately recording homework assignments. As each student stops by, the ‘check-out’ person reviews the student’s recording of assignments to ensure that he or she has written them down completely.

13. The student fails to take work materials home that are required for his/her homework assignment.

- When writing assignments on the board, include a list of required work materials as a reminder to students.
- At the close of class, remind students what materials they will need for homework.
- Have the student keep one set of textbooks at home and one at school.
- Post worksheets to be done as homework on the Internet where students can download and print off as needed.
- Explicitly teach students how to prepare at the end of each school day for that night’s homework. Instruct students to review each instructor’s homework assignment and verify that they have put the necessary work materials to do that assignment into their backpack.
or book bag. For students who need additional practice, walk them to their lockers at the end of the day and coach them as they pull together their homework materials.

14. The student does not have a regular routine (fixed time, location, etc.) for studying and completing homework.
   - Have the student complete a homework schedule each week with adequate time set aside daily for homework. Verify with the student’s parent(s) that the student is abiding by the schedule.
   - Meet with the student to identify both a place at home where the student can do homework without distractions and a set time for doing homework. Check in with the student occasionally to monitor his or her homework habits.
   - If the home environment is not conducive for completing homework, encourage the student to find another location (e.g., local branch of the public library, community center) suitable for homework.
   - Encourage the student to use study halls or other in-school time to get a head start on homework.
   - Team up with other teachers to sponsor a ‘homework club’ where students can stay after school to complete homework with adult support and supervision. Consider having different teachers ‘host’ the club on different nights of the week.

15. The student lacks an efficient strategy for completing homework assignments.
   - Train students in the specific steps needed to build a work plan for doing homework. Show them how to preview their afterschool assignments, order those assignments so that they do the most difficult first (when their energy level is highest), break larger assignments into smaller sub-tasks, and estimate how much time each assignment is likely to require. Assign students to create their own homework plans for a week and to turn them in to you. Follow up by asking students to reflect on how their use of these plans may have improved their homework completion.
   - If you are giving students an especially challenging homework assignment, provide them with strategies (e.g., time-saving tips, techniques to check for mistakes, etc.) for doing that homework efficiently.
   - Suggest to students that they take short breaks between homework assignments (e.g., spending 10 minutes watching television) to refresh and reenergize.
   - Recommend to students (and perhaps to their parents) that they remove unnecessary ‘time-wasters’ from the homework setting (e.g., Internet messaging, television, radio, cell phones).
   - Enlist the student’s parent to serve as a ‘homework coach’, meeting with the student each night to look over assignments, set up a plan for completing the homework, monitoring the student’s actual time spent doing homework, and reviewing finished work to verify its completeness and quality.

16. The student completes homework but fails to turn it in at school.
   - Meet with the student’s parents and suggest that they check each morning to be sure that the student has all completed homework assignments in his or her backpack before leaving for school.
Set up a homework chart for the student. Award the student a point for each day that he or she turns in homework. Allow the student to redeem collected points for rewards or privileges.

Build a sense of personal accountability by requiring that students put their homework directly in your hand as they walk in the door at the beginning of class. Note which students fail to turn in homework and approach them before the class period is over to have them pledge when they will turn it in.

Send ‘overdue homework’ notices home every several weeks to parents of your students. The notices should include enough information about the missing assignments so that the parents have all the information that they need to prod their child to get the work done and turn it in.

Designate a staff member to be a ‘homework check-in’ person for selected students. At the beginning of the day, students go to the staff member in the school’s main office and surrender their completed homework assignments. The staff member immediately puts students’ homework in the appropriate teachers’ mailboxes.

Encourage students to complete their homework in study halls or in an afterschool ‘homework club’. Appoint a staff member to collect students' completed homework before they leave for the day and to put finished homework into the appropriate teachers' mailboxes.
The Good Behavior Game is an approach to the management of classrooms behaviors that rewards children for displaying appropriate on-task behaviors during instructional times. The class is divided into two teams and a point is given to a team for any inappropriate behavior displayed by one of its members. The team with the fewest number of points at the Game's conclusion each day wins a group reward. If both teams keep their points below a preset level, then both teams share in the reward. The program was first tested in 1969; several research articles have confirmed that the Game is an effective means of increasing the rate of on-task behaviors while reducing disruptions in the classroom (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969; Harris & Sherman, 1973; Medland & Stachnik, 1972).

The process of introducing the Good Behavior Game into a classroom is a relatively simple procedure. There are five steps involved in putting the Game into practice.

**Steps in Implementing This Intervention**

**Step 1:** Decide when to schedule the Game. The teacher first decides during what period(s) of the school day the Game will be played. As a rule of thumb, instructors should pick those times when the entire class is expected to show appropriate academic behaviors. Blocks of time devoted to reading, math, content instruction, and independent seatwork would be most appropriate for putting the Game into effect.

**Step 2:** Clearly define the negative behaviors that will be scored during the Game. Teachers who have used the Good behavior Game typically define three types of negative behavior that will be scored whenever they appear during the Game. Those behaviors are:

- leaving one's seat,
- talking out, and


- **engaging in disruptive behavior.**

**Out-of-seat behavior** is defined as any incident in which a student leaves his or her seat without first getting permission from the teacher. Related behaviors, such as "scootching" one's seat toward another desk are usually scored as out-of-seat. Instructors often build in certain exceptions to this rule. For example, in some classrooms, children can take a pass to the bathroom, approach the teacher's desk for additional help, or move from one work site to another in the room without permission as long as these movements are conducted quietly and are a part of the accepted classroom routine. Children who leave their seats intending to complete an allowed activity but find that they cannot (e.g., walking toward the teacher's desk and then noticing that another student is already there) are not scored as being out of their seat if they quickly and quietly return to their desk.

**Talking-out behavior** is defined as any incident of talking out loud without the permission of the instructor. Permission is gained by raising one's hand and first being recognized by the teacher before speaking. Any type of unauthorized vocalization within the hearing of the instructor is scored as talking out, including shouts, nonsense noises (e.g., growling, howling, whistling), whispers, and talking while one's hand is raised.

**Disruptive behavior** consists of any movement or act that is judged by the teacher to be disruptive of classroom instruction. For example, knocking on a table, looking around the room, tearing up paper, passing notes, or playing with toys at one's desk would all be scored as disruptive behaviors. A good rule of thumb would be to regard as disruptive behavior any action that does not fall under another category but is perceived by the teacher as annoying or distracting.

**Step 3: Decide upon suitable daily and (perhaps) weekly rewards for teams winning the Game.**

Teachers will need to choose rewards that they feel will effectively motivate students to take part in the Game. Most often, instructors use free time as a daily reward, since children often find it motivating. To cite a single example, one teacher's reward system included giving her daily 4th-grade Game winners the privilege of wearing a "victory tag," putting a star next to their names on a "Winner's Chart," lining up first for lunch, and getting 30 minutes of time at the end of the day to work on fun, educationally related topics.

When choosing rewards, instructors are advised to consider using reinforcers that fit naturally into the context and mission of a classroom. For example, allowing winners to play quietly together at the end of the school day may help to promote social skills, but dispensing material rewards (e.g., comic books) to winners would probably be less likely to contribute directly to educational and social goals. Of course, if both teams win on a given day or a given week, the members of those teams all receive the same rewards.

**Step 4: Introduce the Game to the class.**

Once behaviors have been selected and clearly defined by the teacher, the next step is to
introduce the Game to the class. Ideally, time should be set aside for an initial group
discussion. The teacher mentions that the class will be playing a game and presents a
schedule clearly setting forth the instructional times during which the game will be in effect.

The teacher next divides the classroom into two teams. For ease of recording, it is usually
recommended that the instructor divide the class down the center of the room into roughly equal
halves. Some teachers have used three teams successfully as well. To build a sense of team
spirit, students may be encouraged to name their groups.

The children are informed that certain types of behavior (i.e., leaving one's seat or talking
without permission, and engaging in disruptive behaviors) will earn points for the team to which
they belong. Students are also told that both teams can win if they earn no more than a certain
number of points (e.g., 4 points maximum per day). If both teams happen to exceed 4 points,
then the team with the lowest total at the end of the day is the winner. In case of a tie, both
teams earn the reward. The instructor is the final judge of whether a behavior is to be scored.
(As an option, students can also be told that the team with the fewest number of points at the
end of the week will win an additional reward.)

It is a good idea when introducing the Game to students to clearly review examples of
acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. After all, it is important that all children know the rules
before the Game begins. To more effectively illustrate those rules, children may be recruited to
demonstrate acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, or the teacher may describe a number
of behaviors and ask the class to decide with a show of hands whether such behaviors are to
be scored or not.

**Step 5: Put the Game into effect.**

The instructor is now ready to start the Game. During those times that the game is in effect in
the classroom, the teacher continues to carry out his or her usual instructional practices. The
only alteration in the routine is that the instructor is also noting and publicly recording any
negative points incurred by either team. Instructors might want to post scores on the
blackboard or on a large piece of paper visible to everyone in the room. If working with children
in a small group, the instructor can record negative behaviors on a small note pad and later
transfer them to the blackboard. Teachers can also choose to publicly announce when another
point has been earned as a reminder to the class about acceptable behavior. It is helpful to
keep a weekly tally of points for each team, especially if teams are competing for weekly as
well as daily rewards.

Care should be taken to be as consistent as possible in scoring negative behaviors. Winning
teams should be praised as well as rewarded for their efforts, with that praise tied when
possible to specifically observed behaviors. Instructors may want to alter the Game somewhat
as necessary (e.g., changing rewards or more carefully defining acceptable and unacceptable
behaviors with students). Obviously, any alteration of the Game, no matter how small, should be
shared with the classroom before being put into effect.

**Troubleshooting: How to Deal With Common Problems in Using the 'Good Behavior Game'**
**Q:** What should I do if a small number of students try to sabotage the game for other children by deliberately acting out and earning penalty points for their team?

If a small number of students are earning a large number of points during the Game, consider forming them into a separate team. While not the norm, occasionally a single student or small group of children may be tempted to undermine the Game by deliberately incurring a large number of penalty points for their teams. (Such children may find the resulting negative social attention of other members of their team to be its own reward!) A simple remedy for this problem is to modify the Game by making those disruptive students into a separate team. The Game will continue unchanged, except that your room will now have three teams rather than two competing for rewards.

**Q:** I have used the Good Behavior Game for a while and have found it to be effective. But lately it doesn't seem to have the same impact on my students. What do you recommend?

If the Good Behavior Game appears to be losing effectiveness over time, be sure that you are consistently noting and assigning team points for inappropriate behaviors and that you are avoiding verbal arguments with students. It is very important that points be assigned consistently when you witness inappropriate behavior; otherwise, the Game may not bring about the expected behavioral improvement among your students. Teachers using the Game sometimes find it helpful to have another adult familiar with the Good Behavior Game observe them and offer feedback about their consistency in assigning points and success in avoiding negative verbal exchanges with students.

---

**References**


Reducing Problem Behaviors Through Good Academic Management: 10 Strategies

Students who are confrontational or non-compliant frequently have poor academic skills, a low sense of self-efficacy as learners, and a very negative attitude toward school (Sprick, et al., 2002). Misbehavior often stems from academic deficits. Educators who work with these behaviorally challenging learners, however, often make the mistake of overlooking simple academic strategies that have been shown to shape student behavior in powerful and positive ways. Here are ten research-based ideas on academic management that no teacher of difficult-to-manage students should be without!

1. **Be sure that assigned work is not too easy and not too difficult.** It is surprising how often classroom behavior problems occur simply because students find the assigned work too difficult or too easy (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). When assignments are too simple, the student may become bored and distracted. When work is too hard, the student is likely to feel frustrated and upset because he or she cannot complete the assignment. As a significant mismatch between the assignment and the student's abilities can trigger misbehavior, teachers should inventory each student's academic skills and adjust assignments as needed to ensure that the student is appropriately challenged but not overwhelmed by the work.

2. **Offer frequent opportunities for choice.** Teachers who allow students a degree of choice in structuring their learning activities typically have fewer behavior problems in their classrooms than teachers who do not. (Kern et al., 2002). Providing choices gives students a sense of autonomy and voice in their learning. It should also be remembered that no teacher could possibly anticipate each student's idiosyncratic learning needs in every situation. If students are offered choice in structuring their academic activities, however, they will frequently select those options that make their learning easier and more manageable. In sum, students who exercise academic choice are more likely to be active, motivated managers of their own learning and less likely to simply act out due to frustration or boredom.

As an example of choice at the group level, an instructor may let the entire class vote on which of two lessons they would prefer to have presented that day. Choice can be incorporated into individual assignments too. In independent seatwork, for example, a student might be allowed to choose which of several short assignments to do first, the books or other research materials to be used, the response format (e.g., writing a short essay, preparing an oral report), etc. One efficient way to promote choice in the classroom is for the teacher to create a master menu of options that students can select from in various learning situations. An instructor, for example, may teach the class that during any independent assignment, students will always have a chance to (1) choose from at least 2 assignment options, (2) sit where they want in the classroom, and (3) select a peer-buddy to check their work. Student choice then becomes integrated seamlessly into the classroom routine.

3. **Select high-interest or functional learning activities.** Kids are more motivated to learn when their instructional activities are linked to a topic of high interest (Kern et al., 2002). A teacher who discovers
that her math group of 7th-graders loves NASCAR racing, for example, may be able to create engaging math problems based on car-racing statistics. Students may also be energized to participate in academic activities if they believe that these activities will give them functional skills that they value (Miller et al., 2003). One instructor assigned to work with a special-education classroom of high school boys with serious behavior problems related that she had great difficulty managing the class—until she realized that each of them wanted to learn to drive. So the teacher brought in copies of the state driver’s education manual and that became the instructional text. The students were much better behaved because they were now motivated learners working toward the pragmatic real-world goal of learning to drive (R. Sarsfield, personal communication).

4. **Instruct students at a brisk pace.** A myth of remedial education is that special-needs students must be taught at a slower, less demanding pace than their general-education peers (Heward, 2003). In fact, a slow pace of instruction can actually cause significant behavior problems, because students become bored and distracted. Teacher-led instruction should be delivered at a sufficiently brisk pace to hold student attention. An important additional benefit of a brisk instructional pace is that students cover more academic material more quickly, accelerating their learning (Heward, 2003).

5. **Structure lessons to require active student involvement.** Here is a powerful concept in behavior management: it is very difficult for students to be actively engaged in academics and to misbehave at the same time! When teachers require that students participate in lessons rather than sit as passive listeners, they increase the odds that these students will become caught up in the flow of the activity and not drift off into misbehavior (Heward, 2003). Students can be encouraged to be active learning participants in many ways. A teacher, for example, may call out questions and have the class give the answer in unison (‘choral responding’); pose a question, give the class ‘think time’, and then draw a name from a hat to select a student to give the answer; or direct students working independently on a practice problem to ‘think aloud’ as they work through the steps of the problem. Students who have lots of opportunities to actively respond and receive teacher feedback also demonstrate substantial learning gains (Heward, 1994).

6. **Incorporate cooperative-learning opportunities into instruction.** Traditional teacher lecture is frequently associated with high rates of student misbehavior. When misbehavior occurs in a large-group format, it also can have a large negative impact: one acting-out student who gets into a power-struggle with the lecturing instructor will interrupt learning for the entire class. There is evidence, though, that when students are given well-structured assignments and placed into work-pairs or cooperative learning groups, behavior problems typically diminish (Beyda et al., 2002). Furthermore, if a behavior problem should occur while cooperative groups are working together, the teacher is often able to approach and privately redirect the misbehaving student without disrupting learning in the other groups (Beyda et al., 2002).

Even positive teacher practices can be more effective when used in cooperative-learning settings. When instructors teaching in lecture format take the time to give extended feedback and provide coaching to individuals, other students can become disengaged and off-task. If students are working in pairs or small groups, though, teacher feedback given to one group or individual does not interrupt learning for the other groups.

7. **Give frequent teacher feedback and encouragement.** Praise and other positive interactions between teacher and student serve an important instructional function, because these exchanges regularly
remind the student of the classroom behavioral and academic expectations and give the student clear evidence that he or she is capable of achieving those expectations (Mayer, 2000).

Unfortunately, in most classrooms, educators tend to deliver many more reprimands than they do praise statements. This imbalance is understandable: after all, teachers are under pressure to devote most of their class time to deliver high-quality instruction and tend to interrupt that instruction only when forced to deal with disruptive behavior. A high rate of reprimands and low rate of praise, however, can have several negative effects. First, if teachers do not regularly praise and encourage students who act appropriately, those positive student behaviors may whither away through lack of recognition. Second, students will probably find a steady diet of reprimands to be punishing and might eventually respond by withdrawing from participation or even avoiding the class altogether. A goal for teachers should be to engage in at least 3 to 4 positive interactions with the student for each reprimand given (Sprick, et al., 2002). Positive interactions might include focused, specific praise, non-verbal exchanges (e.g., smile or ‘thumbs-up’ from across the room), or even an encouraging note written on the student’s homework assignment. These positive interactions are brief and can often be delivered in the midst of instruction.

8. **Provide correct models during independent work.** In virtually every classroom, students are expected to work independently on assignments. Independent seatwork can be a prime trigger, though, for serious student misbehavior (DuPaul & Stoner, 2002). One modest instructional adjustment that can significantly reduce problem behaviors is to supply students with several correctly completed models (work examples) to use as a reference (Miller et al., 2003). A math instructor teaching quadratic equations, for example, might provide 4 models in which all steps in solving the equation are solved. Students could refer to these models as needed when completing their own worksheets of similar algebra problems. Or an English/Language Arts teacher who assigns his class to compose a letter to their U.S. Senator might allow them to refer to three ‘model’ letters while they write.

9. **Be consistent in managing the academic setting.** Picture this (not-uncommon) scenario: A teacher complains that her students routinely yell out answers without following the classroom rule of first raising their hand to be recognized. She invites an observer into the classroom to offer her some ideas for reducing the number of call-outs. The observer quickly discovers that the teacher often ignores students who have raised their hand and instead accepts answers that are blurted out. Because she is inconsistent in enforcing her classroom rules, the teacher is actually contributing to student misbehavior!

As a group, students with challenging behaviors are more likely than their peers to become confused by inconsistent classroom routines. Teachers can hold down the level of problem behaviors by teaching clear expectations for academic behaviors and then consistently following through in enforcing those expectations (Sprick et al., 2002). Classrooms run more smoothly when students are first taught routines for common learning activities--such as participating in class discussion, turning in homework, breaking into cooperative learning groups, and handing out work materials—and then the teacher consistently enforces those same routines by praising students who follow them, reviewing those routines periodically, and reteaching them as needed.

10. **Target interventions to coincide closely with ‘point of performance’**. Skilled teachers employ many strategies to shape or manage challenging student behaviors. For instance, a teacher may give a ‘pre-correction’ (reminder about appropriate behaviors) to a student who is about to leave the room to attend a school assembly, award a ‘good behavior’ raffle-ticket to a student who displayed exemplary
behavior in the hallway, or allow a student to collect a reward that she had earned for being on time to class for the whole week.

It is generally a good idea for teachers who work with a challenging students to target their behavioral and academic intervention strategies to coincide as closely as possible with that student’s ‘point of performance’ (the time that the student engages in the behavior that the teacher is attempting to influence) (DuPaul & Stoner, 2002). So a teacher is likely to be more successful in getting a student to take his crayons to afternoon art class if that teacher reminds the student just as the class is lining up for art than if she were to remind him at the start of the day. A student reward will have a greater impact if it is given near the time in which it was earned than if it is awarded after a two-week delay. Teacher interventions tend to gain in effectiveness as they are linked more closely in time to the students’ points of performance that they are meant to influence.

References


Paired Reading

Description: The student reads aloud in tandem with an accomplished reader. At a student signal, the helping reader stops reading, while the student continues on. When the student commits a reading error, the helping reader resumes reading in tandem.

Materials:
- Reading book

Preparation:
- The teacher, parent, adult tutor, or peer tutor working with the student should be trained in advance to use the paired-reading approach.

Intervention Script:
1. Sit with the student in a quiet location without too many distractions. Position the book selected for the reading session so that both you and the student can easily follow the text.

2. Say to the student, “Now we are going to read aloud together for a little while. Whenever you want to read alone, just tap the back of my hand like this [demonstrate] and I will stop reading. If you come to a word you don’t know, I will tell you the word and begin reading with you again.”

3. Begin reading aloud with the student. If the student misreads a word, point to the word and pronounce it. Then have the student repeat the word. When the student reads the word correctly, resume reading through the passage.

4. When the child delivers the appropriate signal (a hand tap), stop reading aloud and instead follow along silently as the student continues with oral reading. Be sure occasionally to praise the student in specific terms for good reading (e.g., “That was a hard word. You did a nice job sounding it out!”).

5. If, while reading alone, the child either commits a reading error or hesitates for longer than 5 seconds, point to the error-word and pronounce it. Then tell the student to say the word. When the student pronounces the error-word correctly, begin reading aloud again in unison with the student.

6. Continue reading aloud with the student until he or she again signals to read alone.

Tips:
Paired reading is a highly structured but simple strategy that can easily be taught to others—including to school-age children and youth. If you have a pool of responsible older
students available you may want to create a cross-age peer tutoring program that uses paired reading as its central intervention. Or train parents to use this simple reading strategy when they read with their children at home.

References:
“Click or Clunk?” A Student Comprehension Self-Check

**Description:** Students periodically check their understanding of sentences, paragraphs, and pages of text as they read. When students encounter problems with vocabulary or comprehension, they use a checklist to apply simple strategies to solve those reading difficulties.

Reserve at least a full instructional session to introduce this comprehension strategy. (For effective-teaching tips, consult the guidelines presented in “Introducing Academic Strategies to Students: A Direct-Instruction Approach”).

**Materials:**
- Overhead transparencies of practice reading passages and “My Reading Check Sheet”, transparency markers
- Student copies of practice reading passages (optional) or reading/text books, “My Reading Check Sheet”

**Preparation:**
- Prepare overheads of sample passages.

**Intervention Script:**
1. Tell students that they will be learning ways to read more carefully. Hand out student copies of “My Reading Check Sheet”.

   Review all of the reading strategies on the student handout.

   Instruct students that, during any reading assignment, when they come to:

   - the end of each sentence, they should ask the question, “Did I understand this sentence?” If students understand the sentence, they say “Click!” and continue reading. If they do not understand, they say “Clunk!” and refer to the strategy sheet “My Reading Check Sheet” to correct the problem.

   - the end of each paragraph, they should ask the question, “What did the paragraph say?” If they do not know the main idea(s) of the paragraph, students refer to the strategy sheet “My Reading Check Sheet” to correct the problem.

   - the end of each page, they should ask the question, “What do I remember?” If they do not remember sufficient information, students refer to the strategy sheet
“My Reading Check Sheet” to correct the problem.

Read through a sample passage with the class. At the end of each sentence, paragraph, and page, “think aloud” as you model use of the comprehension checks. (As you read each sentence, be sure to call out “Click!” when you and the class understand a sentence and “Clunk!” when you do not.)

2. When students have learned to use the “Click or Clunk?” strategy, have them use it in independent reading assignments.

Tips:
Silent “Click/Clunk” Signals. Although it may seem rather silly to have students call out “Click” and “Clunk” as an aid to monitor their own reading, the technique is actually quite valuable. When students must make regular summary judgments about how well they comprehend at the sentence level, they are more likely to recognize—and to resolve—comprehension errors as these mistakes arise.

You might find, however, that students start to distract each other as they call out these comprehension signals. Once you see that students consistently use the technique, you can train them to softly whisper the signal. Or confer with your students to come up with an unobtrusive non-verbal signal (e.g., lightly tapping the desk once for “Click” and twice for “Clunk”) that is obvious enough to allow you to monitor readers’ use of the technique without distracting other students.

References:

My Reading Check Sheet *

Name: __________________ Class: _____________

Sentence Check… “Did I understand this sentence?”
If you had trouble understanding a word in the sentence, try...
- Reading the sentence over.
- Reading the next sentence.
- Looking up the word in the glossary (if the book or article has one).
- Asking someone.

If you had trouble understanding the meaning of the sentence, try...
- Reading the sentence over.
- Reading the whole paragraph again.
- Reading on.
- Asking someone.

Paragraph Check… “What did the paragraph say?”
If you had trouble understanding what the paragraph said, try...
- Reading the paragraph over.

Page Check… “What do I remember?”
If you had trouble remembering what was said on this page, try...
- Re-reading each paragraph on the page, and asking yourself, “What did it say?”

*Adapted from Anderson (1980), Babbs (1984)
Effective Teacher Commands: Establishing Classroom Control

As classroom managers, teachers regularly use commands to direct students to start and stop activities. Instructors find commands to be a crucial tool for classroom management, serving as instructional signals that help students to conform to the teacher’s expectations for appropriate behaviors.

Teachers frequently dilute the power of their classroom commands, however, by:

- **presenting commands as questions or polite requests.** Commands have less impact when stated as questions or requests, because the student may believe that he or she has the option to decline. The teacher who attempts, for example, to quiet a talkative student by saying, “Tanya, could you mind keeping your voice down so that other students can study?” should not be surprised if the student replies, “No, thank you. I would prefer to talk!”

- **stating commands in vague terms.** A student may ignore a command such as “Get your work done!” because it does not state specifically what behaviors the teacher expects of the student.

- **following up commands with excessive justifications or explanations.** Because teachers want to be viewed as fair, they may offer long, drawn-out explanations for why they are requiring the class or an individual student to undertake or to stop a behavior. Unfortunately, students can quickly lose the thread the explanation and even forget the command that preceded it!

**Using Effective Commands**

Teachers can reduce problems with student compliance and make their commands more forceful by following research-based guidelines (Walker & Walker, 1992):

- Are brief
- Are delivered one at a time
- Use specific language so that the student clearly understands the request
- Avoid an authoritative, “Do it my way or else!” tone of voice
- Avoid strong negative emotion or sarcasm
- Are stated as directives rather than as questions
- Avoid long explanations or justifications (and present any explanation before the command rather than after it)
- Allow the student a short but reasonable amount of time to comply without additional teacher comments or directives
Effective commands:

- **are brief.** Students can process only so much information. Students tend to comply best with brief commands because they are easy to understand and hard to misinterpret.

- **are delivered one task or objective at a time.** When a command contains multi-step directions, students can mishear, misinterpret, or forget key steps. A student who appears to be noncompliant may simply be confused about which step in a multi-step directive to do first!

- **are delivered in a matter-of-fact, businesslike tone.** Students may feel coerced when given a command in an authoritarian, sarcastic, or angry tone of voice. For that reason alone, they may resist the teacher’s directive. Teachers will often see greater student compliance simply by giving commands in a neutral or positive manner.

- **are stated as directives rather than questions.** Perhaps to be polite, teachers may phrase commands as questions (e.g., “Could we all take out our math books now?”). A danger in using ‘question-commands’ is that the student may believe that he or she has the option to decline! Teachers should state commands as directives, saving questions for those situations in which the student exercises true choice.

- **avoid long explanations or justifications.** When teachers deliver commands and then tack lengthy explanations onto them, they diminish the force of the directive. If the instructor believes that students should know why they are being told to do something, the teacher should deliver a brief explanation prior to the command.

- **give the student a reasonable amount of time to comply.** Once the teacher has given a command, he or she should give the student a reasonable timespan (e.g., 5-15 seconds) to comply. During that waiting period, the instructor should resist the temptation to nag the student, elaborate on the request, or otherwise distract the student.

References:
Effective Teacher Commands: Establishing Classroom Control Workshop Activity

Directions: A series of 6 teacher commands and requests appears below. For each example, note any flaws in the teacher response. (Use the table on the right to review the elements of effective teacher commands.) Then rewrite the teacher verbal response (or describe an alternative way the teacher could have acted to head off or handle the situation more effectively).

1. Thaddeus, I know that you finished the quiz early, but it is important that you not distract the other students while they are trying to work. You wouldn’t want them to do poorly on the quiz, would you?

2. Maria, how many times do I have to tell you to stop being so disruptive! Every time that I have to talk to you, you take my attention away from the other students! Please try to be more considerate!

3. OK, class. Pull out the writing assignment that you had for homework last night. Pair off with a neighbor. Each one of you should read the others’ assignment. Then you should edit your partner’s work, using our peer-editing worksheet. Finally, review your editing comments with your partner. You have 20 minutes. Begin!

4. Jason, could you please put away that comic book and get started on your homework assignment?

5. Anna, I want you to be sure to go straight home from school today! Yesterday afternoon after school dismissal, I was in my car and noticed that you and your friends were utilizing the snowbanks along Henry Street, where there is a lot of traffic. I want you to go straight home today and not dawdle!

6. Carl, why don’t you speak up so that you can distract the entire class with your talking?
# Strategies for Working With Emotionally Unpredictable Students

## Stage 1: Frustration

### Warning Signs: The student may…
- bite nails or lips
- grimace
- mutter or grumble
- appear flushed or tense
- seem ‘stuck’ on a topic or issue

### Strategies to prevent or reduce the intensity of student frustration:
- Antiseptic bounce: Send the student from the room on an errand or task.
- Permit student to go to quiet spot within or outside of classroom on ‘respite break’ (brief cool-down period).
- Teach the student appropriate ways to seek help when stuck on academic assignment.
- Spend 5 minutes talking through issue with student (or send student to another caring adult)
- Give student an ‘IOU’ to meet with adult to talk over issue at more convenient time.
- Teach student to recognize signs of emotional upset and to use ‘self-calming’ strategies.
- Teach the student how to negotiate with instructors about assignments or work expectations.
- Use motivation strategies to make learning more inviting (see *Finding the Spark* handout)

## Stage 2: Defensiveness

### Warning Signs: The student may…
- lash out verbally at others.
- withdraw (emotionally or physically).
- challenge the authority of the instructor or other adult.
- refuse to comply with adult requests or to follow classroom routines.
- project blame onto others.

### Strategies to prevent or reduce the intensity of student defensiveness:
- Avoid discussions of “who is right” or “who is in control”.
- Approach the student privately, make eye contact, address the student in a quiet voice about his or her behavior.
- Use humor to ‘defuse’ conflict situation.
- Consider an apology if you have inadvertently wronged or offended the student.
- Impose appropriate consequences on peers if they are provoking the student through teasing, taunts, verbal challenges, or physical horseplay.
- Help the student to identify appropriate range of responses for the situation and to select one.
- Permit student some ‘leeway’ on assignment or classroom expectations (as an acknowledgement of the life- or situational stress that they might be experiencing).
- Teach the student non-stigmatizing ways to get academic help, support in the classroom.
- Direct the student to write down the main points of his or her concerns. Promise that you will read through the student’s account and meet individually to discuss the problem.
• Use effective ‘teacher commands’ to direct the student: (1) keep each command brief, (2) state command directly rather than in “Could you please...” format, (3) use businesslike tone, avoiding anger and sarcasm, (4) avoid lengthy explanations for why you are making the request, (4) repeat command once if student fails to comply, then follow up with pre-determined consequences.

• Use planned ignoring (NOTE: This strategy works best when the student lacks an audience).

## Stage 3: Aggression

**Warning Signs:** The student may...
- make verbal threats
- use abusive language
- assume threatening posture (e.g., with fists raised)
- physically strike out at peers or adults

**Strategies to react to, prepare for or respond to student verbal or physical aggression:**
- Remove other students or adults from the immediate vicinity of student (to protect their safety, eliminate an audience)
- Adopt a ‘supportive stance’: step slightly to the side of the student and orient your body so that you face the student obliquely at a 45- to 90-degree angle.
- Respect the student’s ‘personal space.’ Most people interpret the distance extending outward from their body to a distance of 2-1/2 to 3 feet as a bubble of ‘personal space.’ To both ensure your physical safety and reduce the student's sense of threat, always stand at least a leg's length away from the student.
- Use supportive 'paraverbal' and non-verbal communication. Children are adept at ‘reading’ our moods and feelings through non-verbal signals such as facial expressions, and body language. Maintain a calm tone of voice and body posture to project acceptance and support for the student.
- Do not block the door. Unless you have a compelling reason to do so (e.g., with very young children), try not to block the upset child's access to the door as you approach the student. The student may interpret a blocked exit as a threat and attempt to go around or even through you to escape.
- Deliver a clear statement of choices. Here is a 3-step approach for making requests to upset students:

1. **Give the student two clear choices with clear consequences.** Order the choices so that the student hears the teacher-preferred choice last e.g., "John, you can refuse to participate in the math assignment and be written up for detention or you can start the math assignment now and not be written up.” Make sure above all that you can enforce any consequences that you present to the student.

2. **If the student fails to comply in a reasonable amount of time to Step 1,** state clearly and firmly what you want the student to do. Include a time limit for student compliance and specify a location if necessary. For example, a teacher may tell the student, “John, I want you to return to your desk [location] now [time-frame] and begin your math assignment [requested behavior].”
3. If the student still fails to comply with your request, enforce alternative consequences that you have selected in advance.

- Put together a classroom crisis plan. Instructors who plan their responses to possible crisis situations are much more able to respond quickly and appropriately if and when such events occur. You can take charge of crisis planning by becoming familiar with your school's crisis plan, talking with staff whose rooms are near yours about how you can mutually help one another out in the event of a crisis, and teaching your students how they should respond (e.g., by evacuating the classroom in an orderly fashion) if a crisis situation occurs.

References


Extending Learning Across Time & Space: The Power of Generalization

Teachers have every right to celebrate when they finally succeed in teaching struggling students to use academic or behavioral strategies in their classrooms. Despite this encouraging start, though, teachers often still face an important challenge with their interventions. A frequent stumbling block to an effective intervention outcome is that the student fails to transfer academic or behavioral strategies to other settings or situations where those strategies would be most useful. That is, students may not generalize their positive behavior changes, which can greatly reduce the overall positive impact of classroom interventions.

To appreciate the importance of generalization, consider these examples:

- Sarah, a 4th grade student, has a one-year reading delay and needs lots of practice in reading to increase her rate of decoding. However, she never picks up a book outside of school.

- Jack, an 8th-grader, gets into fights frequently and has poor relationships with peers. He participates in a social-skills group. When interacting with other students under the watchful eye of the school counselor, Jack shows that he is able both to identify when he becomes angry and employ several strategies to calm himself down. In unstructured settings such as the lunchroom or hallway, though, Jack continues to get into arguments and shoving matches with other students.

- Thomas has learned terrific study skills in his 7th-grade social studies class. His class notes were once a shambles—but now are neatly written and thorough. In science class, however, Thomas’ notes continue to be messy and incomplete, and his science test grades suffer as a result.

While the student scenarios presented here vary, they share a single characteristic: The student has failed to transfer, or generalize, learned behaviors to new settings or situations.

When developing school-based interventions, most educators simply ‘treat and hope’ (Rutherford & Nelson, 1988). That is, they put together research-based strategies to improve student behaviors or academic performance—and then hope that the student will generalize the successful strategies rather than explicitly train the student to apply these new, more adaptive strategies to other situations in which they would be useful.

There are several explanations for why a student may fail to generalize a skill to a new setting or situation.

- One barrier to generalization is that the student may not be able to identify relevant cues in the new setting that would trigger that student’s use of the target skill. For example, our 4th-grade
student Sarah is not likely to read at home if there are few books available there to remind her that she can choose to read as a leisure activity.

• A second barrier to generalization may be that the student is not reinforced for using a target skill in the new setting or situation. Thomas, the 7th-grader, takes polished notes in social studies because the teacher praises and encourages him for his effort—but he does not put effort into writing his science notes because the science teacher pays little attention to note-taking.

• As yet another generalization barrier, a student’s newly learned behaviors may be suppressed in specific setting because the student’s inappropriate behaviors continue to be unintentionally rewarded, or reinforced, in that setting. So Jack, the 8th-grade student, shows appropriate social skills in a group but does not transfer those same skills to the hallway or lunchroom because he is powerfully reinforced with plenty of peer attention when he gets into arguments and shoving matches with other students. Jack is unlikely to try out new, socially appropriate ways of interacting with peers in natural settings until his reinforcement for engaging in the new behaviors outweighs the payoff he receives for the old, maladaptive behavior.

The following are some ideas that teachers can try when programming for generalization (McConnell, 1987; Rutherford & Nelson, 1988; Stokes & Baer 1977; Stokes & Osnes, 1988). While there are many more strategies for promoting generalization than are contained in this handout, the tips outlined here do address challenges that teachers commonly face in getting students to transfer skills to the settings or situations in which they are most needed.

The student has learned a skill or strategy well in one setting. The goal now is to have the student transfer that skill or strategy to other appropriate settings. (‘Generalization to other settings’)

• Prepare Strategy Sheets. Once the student has mastered a skill or strategy in one setting, assist the student in creating a ‘strategy sheet’ that captures in checklist format the key steps that make up the strategy. Starting in the setting in which the student already successfully uses the strategy, train the student to use the checklist as an independent self-check to verify that he or she is implementing the strategy correctly. (If the targeted strategy is ‘note-taking’, for example, a strategy checklist might include items such as ‘Brought paper and writing materials to class’, ‘Sat near the teacher’, ‘Wrote down all key points’, ‘Highlighted unfamiliar vocabulary’, etc.) Once the student has demonstrated reliably that he or she can use the checklist correctly, meet with the student and identify other settings where the student would benefit from using the strategy. Make a list of those settings. Establish the goal for the student that he or she will use the strategy in the new settings whenever appropriate. Have the student log the times when he or she actually uses the strategy in those new settings. Reward (and praise) the student for instances in which the student successfully employs the skill or strategy under the appropriate circumstances in the new setting.

• Encourage Other Teachers to ‘Coach’ the Strategy. Talk with other educators in your school who work with your student. Describe for them the skill or strategy that your student is able to use reliably in your classroom and that you would like to see generalized to other settings.
Encourage these educators to prompt the student to use the strategy when appropriate in their classrooms. Request that your colleagues keep you informed—and be sure to reward and praise the student whenever teachers outside of your room report that the student has successfully used the strategy!

- **Identify the 'Look-Fors' That Trigger Use of the Strategy.** Help your student to identify key characteristics—or 'look-fors'--of settings in which he or she should use the selected skill or strategy. A student attempting to generalize note-taking skills, for example, may identify 'The teacher lectures to the whole class' as a signal that he should use his note-taking skills. Another student may have learned to take a short discretionary time-out whenever she becomes overly upset with difficult classwork. This student might define 'I try to do schoolwork and I feel a knot in my stomach' as a physical indicator that she should use the time-out strategy, no matter what class she is attending. As an additional support for generalization, inform other educators about the particular strategy the student needs to use in other settings and the key indicators the student has identified that should trigger his or her use of the strategy. If these staff members notice that the student has overlooked an opportunity to employ the strategy in their classrooms, they can approach and prompt that student to use the strategy.

- **Use a Skill Diary.** For academic skills or strategies, ask the student to keep a skill diary in which the student records those situations or settings when he or she has successfully used the strategy. Meet with the student periodically to review entries and reinforce the student's efforts. When conferencing with the student, ask to see examples of those student work products that were created using the skill (e.g., copies of class notes, essays, completed math problems)—both to verify that the student actually used the target strategy as claimed and to check that the strategy is indeed helping the student to improve performance.

- **Standardize Routines Across Classrooms.** Collaborate with other teachers with whom you share students to develop a single, standardized set of general behavior and academic management techniques across all of your classrooms. Students often discover that teacher expectations vary dramatically depending on the classroom they happened to be sitting in. In fact, when faced with differing expectations across classrooms, students are likely to view each room as a separate kingdom governed by its own set of unfathomable rules. We should not be surprised, then, if students who move among highly variable classroom environments fail to generalize skills learned in one of these settings to others. In contrast, when a student encounters uniform academic routines and behavioral expectations in each classroom, that student is more likely independently to generalize adaptive academic and behavioral skills and strategies from one setting to all settings.

The student has responded well to an intervention that includes reinforcement for appropriate behaviors. Now the teacher wants to fade the reinforcement or make the program easier to manage while maintaining the positive behavioral effects. ('Generalization to other reinforcers')

- **Wean the Student From Rewards to Privileges.** Create a set of privileges that you believe the student is likely to find motivating. Sample privileges might be: 'The student is allowed to walk
independently through hallways without adult supervision. The student may be selected by the teacher to run errands etc. When the student displays a stable period (e.g., several weeks) of behavior improvement under the individualized reinforcement program, meet with the student to praise the improvement. Let the student know that you plan to discontinue the reward program because the student has shown that he or she can now be trusted to transition to higher-level privileges. Review those privileges with the student. Let the student know that he or she can continue to access the classroom privileges so long as the student continues to show good behaviors.

- Pair Rewards With Naturally Occurring Classroom Reinforcement. Identify opportunities that naturally occur in your classroom to positively reinforce the student. Examples include teacher or peer praise, social interactions, exposure to interesting learning opportunities, and improved grades. As the student earns rewards under his or her individualized reinforcement program, pair those 'artificial' rewards with natural reinforcers that also appear to motivate the student.

For example, a teacher finds that a behaviorally challenging boy in her class responds very well to praise—but only when that praise is delivered in a private conversation rather than publicly. So whenever the teacher pulls the student aside to give him an earned reward, she uses that opportunity to quietly praise his effort. Eventually, the teacher lets the student know that his behavior has improved to the point where the reward program can be discontinued. However, she continues to meet with him for brief, private 'pep talks', during which she continues to praise his sustained behavioral gains. In this example, praise—a reinforcer naturally available in the classroom—is now maintaining the student's behavioral improvements, having replaced the more artificial set of rewards previously needed to shape the student's behavior.

- Transition from Individual to Classwide Rewards. Create a menu of classwide incentives for appropriate behavior that can be accessed by any student. (For example, any student in the class who displays good behaviors through an entire day may be allowed to spend the last 10 minutes of class in a supervised activity at the gym.)

Your eventual goal is to replace a target student's individualized rewards with the class menu of rewards. Once a target student is able to bring his or her behaviors into line through the use of individualized incentives, the student can be weaned off those individual rewards and instead join peers in selecting earned reinforcers from the classwide reward menu. This approach has two advantages: First, a classwide reward system is often highly motivating and may well bring about substantial improvements in the entire group's behaviors. Second, the target student becomes more fully integrated with 'typical' peers when he or she is able to share in their rewards.

- Give the Student Responsibility for Monitoring Behaviors and Earned Rewards. As the target student demonstrates behavioral success, train that student to monitor his or her own behaviors (e.g., using a daily self-monitoring chart). Inform the student that he or she is responsible for (1) tracking those self-ratings, (2) noting when a reinforcer has been earned, and (3) approaching the teacher to receive a reward. Of course, the teacher should
occasionally ‘spot-check’ the student's self-ratings to ensure that the student is accurately rating his or her behaviors.

**Changes in the classroom environment are required to fully support the student's behavior changes.** (‘Modifying the setting to support target behavior’)

- **Teach the Student to Recruit Reinforcement.** Train the target student to seek reinforcement from others in appropriate ways that support his or her behavioral targets. For example, a student whose attention often wanders during independent seatwork may be trained to politely and quietly ask a peer for help in understanding directions or finding his place in a group assignment. Or a student who often fails to complete classwork but finds teacher attention to be very motivating may be taught to ‘recruit’ teacher praise by reliably turning in completed assignments that demonstrate her best effort.

- **Train Peers to Be Helpers.** Teach classmates routines for providing friendly assistance to one another. Training peers as helpers can foster a positive learning environment, one in which your target student is more likely to be reinforced for taking risks and trying out new, positive behaviors.

  For example, you might train students to assist peers who lose their place in assignments, politely redirect neighboring students whenever they engage in distracting off-task behaviors during learning activities, or check in with ‘peer buddies’ at the end of the day to make sure that they have written down their homework assignments correctly and have the necessary materials to complete their homework. Reward these peer helping behaviors with praise. Also consider the option of assigning ‘prize-points’ to student helpers that can be redeemed for rewards or privileges.

- **Institute a Classwide Reward System.** Put a classwide reward system in place to suppress group negative behaviors that can disrupt the learning environment and undermine a target student's attempts to try out new, appropriate behaviors in the class setting. A teacher might set up a simple group reward program, for example, in which the entire class is awarded 20 'good behavior' points for each morning and 20 points for each afternoon in which they show consistently positive behavior. The class is promised a pizza party when they have accumulated 1200 points. However, the group will fail to earn points in a given morning or afternoon if they persist in negative behaviors after two teacher warnings. Negative behaviors might include talking during teacher-directed lessons, laughing at another student's misbehavior, or engaging in teasing or putdowns. A group behavior plan can help to improve the learning environment and also prevent a target student from being picked on by peers or being encouraged to misbehave.

**Other generalization challenges:**

- **Diversify Student Responses.** Your student may have successfully learned a very narrowly focused behavior but not yet learned how to generalize that behavior to a larger ‘response-class’ (group of functionally equivalent behaviors). For example, a teacher may have a child with cognitive delays who has learned to greet people by saying “hi” but has not yet learned to
generalize his response by accessing a larger pool of possible greetings (e.g., “Good morning”, “Hello”, “How are you?”). In this situation, that instructor might first explicitly teach the student a range of acceptable variations on the learned behavior, next reinforce the student for appropriate use of varied examples from the larger response class in a controlled setting, and finally reinforce the student for using generalized behaviors in real-world settings.

You may also want to teach the student to distinguish between examples and non-examples of a response class so that the student can eventually judge independently whether a particular behavior is appropriate for use within the context of a specific setting or situation. To return to our example, the teacher might train the student to hear a word or phrase and be able to indicate whether it is or is not typically used as a social greeting.

- *Help the Student to Retain Skills Over Time.* Your student appears to have mastered a strategy or skill during one class session but seems to have forgotten that skill by the next class session (‘generalization across time’).

Here are some ideas to try:

Create a checklist for the student that contains the essential steps of the skill or strategy. Have the student adopt a routine of previewing the steps of the checklist just prior to the class or activity in which the student will need to use the strategy. (An eventual goal may be to have the student memorize the key steps of the strategy—perhaps by condensing those steps into an acronym or other memory technique.)

A group instructional strategy that strengthens skill retention is for the teacher to open a class lesson with a brief review of a previously taught skill or concept. Kicking off the lesson with a quick review of previous content will prime your target student with the essential steps of the strategy precisely when he or she will need the information to apply to the current lesson. And your whole class will be more likely to retain past instructional material through this review.

If your student has difficulty in recalling a strategy, don’t be too quick to jump in with the answer. Instead, consider using ‘partial prompts’. Partial prompts give your student hints about how to proceed in his or her problem solving without simply supplying the answer: They are instructional questions or directives that offer the student just enough information to recall the next step in the strategy or skill. Then the student is encouraged to continue with the assignment independently if possible. If a student is stuck on a long-division math computation problem, for instance, the teacher may say, “Point to the number that you will be dividing….Now point to the number that you will divide by….Tell me what the next step is that you will follow.” Partial prompts require students to remain active participants in academic work, rather than allowing them to assume a posture of learned helplessness.

And, finally, don’t overlook this simple tip: Ask the struggling student to ‘think aloud’ by stating what he or she remembers of the skill or strategy that should be used. You may be surprised to discover that the student is able to accurately recall most of the strategy and needs only minor teacher assistance to solve the problem or complete the assignment.
References


Working With Defiant Kids: Communication Tools for Teachers

Teachers cite conflicts with defiant and noncompliant students as being a primary cause of classroom disruption. In many schools, staff believe that student misbehavior is so pervasive that it seriously interferes with effective instruction. This article outlines important communication tools that teachers can use to defuse (or even prevent!) confrontations with students.

Why do classroom conflicts between teachers and students seem to occur so frequently?
Conflicts are social power struggles and must always involve at least two parties. As conflicts between students and teachers appear to be so widespread, it might help to examine what factors tend to push each party into these power struggles.

- **Students** who are prone to conflict often do poorly in school. They may act out in part to mask their embarrassment about their limited academic skills. These students may also lack basic prosocial strategies that would help them to work through everyday school difficulties. For example, students may become confrontational because they do not know how to ask for help on a difficult assignment, lack the ability to sit down with a peer and calmly talk through a problem, or are unable to negotiate politely with a teacher to get an extension on an assignment.

Students can also sometimes adopt defiance toward teachers as a deliberate strategy—because, in the past, this confrontational behavior seems to have ‘paid off’ for them in the form of reduced expectations for schoolwork or improved social standing with peers. The longer that a student has engaged in habitual confrontational behavior, the more time and energy a teacher will probably need to invest in specific strategies to turn that behavior around.

- **Teachers** who get pulled into power struggles with students may not realize that they are often simply reacting to student provocation. For each step that the student escalates the conflict (e.g., raising his or her voice, assuming a threatening posture), the teacher matches the step (e.g., speaking more loudly, moving into the student’s personal space). In other words, a teacher allows the student to control the interaction.

Furthermore, if an instructor has already decided that a student is generally defiant, the teacher may be overly quick to jump to conclusions, interpreting any ambiguous behavior on the part of the student (e.g., muttering in frustration during a test) as intended to be deliberately confrontational (Fisher et al., 1991). The instructor may then reprimand or criticize the student, triggering a confrontation.

What is the most important point to keep in mind when working with a defiant or noncompliant student? The cardinal rule to keep in mind in managing conflicts with students is to stay outwardly calm and to maintain a professional perspective. For example, it is certainly OK to experience anger when a student deliberately attempts to insult or confront you in front of the
entire classroom. If you react with an angry outburst, though, the student will control the interaction, perhaps escalating the conflict until the student engineers his or her desired outcome. If you instead approach the student in a business-like, neutral manner, and impose consistent, fair consequences for misbehavior, you will model the important lesson that you cannot be pulled into a power struggle at the whim of a student.

Instructors who successfully stay calm in the face of student provocation often see two additional benefits:
1. Over time, students may become less defiant, because they no longer experience the ‘reward’ of watching you react in anger;
2. Because you now deal with student misbehavior impartially, efficiently and quickly, you will have more instructional time available that used to be consumed in epic power struggles.

How do I deliver a teacher command in a way that will minimize the chance of a power struggle? You can increase the odds that a student will follow a teacher command by:

- approaching the student privately and using a quiet voice
- establishing eye contact and calling the student by name before giving the command
- stating the command as a positive (do) statement, rather than a negative (don’t) statement.
- phrasing the command in clear and descriptive terms (using simple language that is easily understood) so the student knows exactly what he or she is expected to do (Walker & Walker, 1991).

There are several ways that you might use to deliver a teacher command. The table below presents two sequences for teacher commands, one brief and one extended (Thompson, 1993; Walker & Walker, 1991). Your choice of which to use will depend on your own personal preference and your judgment about how a particular student will respond to each:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Command Sequence (Brief)</th>
<th>Teacher Command Sequence (Extended)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Make the request.</strong> Use simple, clear language that the student understands. If possible, phrase the request as a positive (do) statement, rather than a negative (don’t) statement. (E.g., “John, please start your math assignment now.”) Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds)</td>
<td><strong>1. Make the request.</strong> Use simple, clear language that the student understands. If possible, phrase the request as a positive (do) statement, rather than a negative (don’t) statement. (E.g., “John, please start your math assignment now.”) Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **2. [If the student fails to comply] Repeat the request.** Say to the student, “You need to...” and restate the request. (E.g., “John, you need to start your math assignment now.”) Take no other action. Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds) | **2. [If the student fails to comply] Repeat the request as a 2-part choice.** Give the student two clear choices with clear consequences. Order the choices so that the student hears a pre-selected negative consequence as the first choice and the teacher request as the second choice. (E.g., “John, you can refuse to participate in the math assignment and receive a referral to the principal’s office, or you can...”)

start the math assignment now and not be written up. It’s your choice.”

Take no other action. Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds)

3. If the student fails to comply] **Impose a pre-selected negative consequence.** As you impose the consequence, ignore student questions or complaints that appear intended to entangle you in a power struggle.

3. [Optional-If the student fails to comply] **Offer a face-saving out.** Say to the student, “Is there anything that I can say or do at this time to earn your cooperation?” (Thompson, 1993).

4. [If the student fails to comply] **Impose the pre-selected negative consequence.** As you impose the consequence, ignore student questions or complaints that appear intended to entangle you in a power struggle.

Are there other effective communication strategies that I can use with defiant students?

There are a number of supportive techniques that teachers can use to establish rapport and convey their behavioral expectations clearly to students, including:

- **Active listening.** Active listening, or paraphrasing, is the act of summarizing another person’s ideas, opinions, or point of view in your own words. Students who are chronically hostile and confrontational often believe that nobody truly listens to them. When upset, they frequently interrupt the teacher because they believe that the instructor does not understand their point of view.

  Active listening is powerful because it demonstrates beyond a doubt that you have not only *heard* the student’s comments but that you have grasped his or her opinions so clearly that you can repeat them back to the satisfaction of the speaker. Note, though, that active listening does not imply that you necessarily *agree* with the student’s point of view. Rather, it shows that you fully *comprehend* that viewpoint. Students tend to view teachers who practice active listening as being empathic, respectful, and caring individuals.

  Here are some statements you can use when paraphrasing student comments:

  - “Let me be sure that I understand you correctly…”
  - “I want to summarize the points that you made, so that I know that I heard you right…”
  - “So from your point of view, the situation looks like this…”

  Once you have finished summarizing the student’s point of view, give that student the opportunity to let you know how accurately he or she thinks you paraphrased those views: “Does what I just said sound like your point of view?” And don’t be surprised if the student clarifies his or her position at this point. (“Well, teacher, I don’t think that you really meant to pick on me when I walked into class late, but when you called me by name and drew attention to me, I got really embarrassed!”) Though a simple communication technique, active listening can transform a potential classroom conflict into a productive student/teacher conversation.
One final tip about active listening: when a student is quite upset and talking very quickly, you can safely interrupt him or her, take control of the conversation, and still seem supportive by using an active listening phrase (Thompson, 1993). For example, you might interrupt a student by saying, "Whoa, just a minute! You've covered a lot of ground. Let me just try to sum up what you said so that I know that I am understanding you!"

- **I-centered statements.** When we tell oppositional students that they are engaging in inappropriate behaviors, we run the risk of having them challenge the truth of our statements or of taking offense at being criticized for their conduct. An instructor's use of *I-centered statements* can reduce the potential that teacher criticism will lead to student confrontation. Because I-centered statements reflect only the instructor's opinions and viewpoints, they are less incendiary and open to challenge than more global statements that pin blame for misbehavior on the student.

For example, rather than telling a student, "You are always disrupting class with your jokes and fooling around!," you may say, "Zeke, I find it difficult to keep everybody's attention when there are other conversations going on in the classroom. That's why I need you to open your book and focus on today's lesson."

- **Pairing of criticism with praise (Thompson, 1993).** Sometimes you have no choice but to let a student know directly and bluntly that his or her classroom behaviors are not acceptable. Many oppositional students, though, have experienced a painful history of rejection in personal relationships and lack close ties with adults.

No matter how supportively you present behavioral criticism to these students, they may assume that you are in fact rejecting them as individuals and react strongly to this perceived rejection. One strategy to reassure the student that you continue to value him or her as a person is to (a) describe the problem behavior that you would like to see changed, (b) clearly outline appropriate behavioral alternatives (b) praise the student about some other aspect of his or her behavior or accomplishments, and finally (c) state that you value having the student as a part of the classroom community.

Here is a demonstration of this communication strategy:

1. **Description of problem behavior:** "Trina, you said disrespectful things about other students during our class meeting this morning. You continued to do so even after I asked you to stop."
2. **Appropriate behavioral alternative(s):** "It's OK to disagree with another person's ideas. But you need to make sure that your comments do not insult or hurt the feelings of others."
3. **Specific praise:** "I am talking to you about this behavior because I know that you can do better. In fact, I have really come to value your classroom comments. You have great ideas and express yourself very well."
4. **Affirmation statement:** "You are an important member of this class!"

**What are some conflict 'pitfalls' that I should watch out for?** Communication is never easy, especially when you work with students who can be defiant. You can maximize your chances for successful communication, though, if you:
Avoid a mismatch between your words and nonverbal signals. Students are quick to sense when a speaker's body language and tone of voice convey a different message than his or her words. If the student reads your nonverbal signals as being disrespectful or confrontational, conflict may result. If a teacher speaks politely to a student, for example, but has his fists clenched and uses a sarcastic tone, that student is likely to discount the instructor's words and focus instead on his nonverbal signals. Be sure that you convey sincerity by matching your verbal message with your nonverbal cues.

Take time to plan your response before reacting to provocative student behavior or remarks. It is easy to react without thinking when a student makes comments or engages in behavior that offends or upsets you. If you let anger take over, however, and blurt out the first thing that comes to mind, you may end up making "the greatest speech that you'll ever live to regret" (Thompson, 1993, p. 32). A teacher's angry response can escalate student misbehavior, resulting in a power struggle that spirals out of control. When provoked, take several seconds to collect your thoughts and to think through an appropriate, professional response before you take action.

Do not become entangled in a discussion or argument with a confrontational student (Walker & Walker, 1991). Some students are very skilled at dragging teachers into discussions or arguments that turn into power struggles. When you must deliver a command to, confront, or discipline a student who is defiant or confrontational, be careful not to get 'hooked' into a discussion or argument with that student. If you find yourself being drawn into an exchange with the student (e.g., raising your voice, reprimanding the student), immediately use strategies to disengage yourself (e.g., by moving away from the student, repeating your request in a business-like tone of voice, imposing a pre-determined consequence for noncompliance).

Do not try to coerce or force the student to comply. It is a mistake to use social pressure (e.g., reprimands, attempting to stare down students, standing watch over them) or physical force to make a confrontational student comply with a request (Walker & Walker, 1991). The student will usually resist and a power struggle will result. In particular, adults should not lay hands on a student to force compliance--as the student will almost certainly view this act as a serious physical threat and respond in kind.

What are proactive steps that I can take to head off or minimize conflict with students?
The best way to handle a student conflict is to prevent it from occurring altogether: Some ideas to accomplish this are to:

Offer the student face-saving exit strategies. According to Fisher, et al. (1993), “face-saving reflects a person's need to reconcile the stand he takes in a negotiation or agreement with his principles and with his past words and deeds” (p. 29). When a potential confrontation looms, you can give a student a face-saving way out by phrasing your request in a way that lets the student preserve his or her self-image even as the student complies.

A teacher, for example, who says to a student, “Rashid, take out your book now and pay attention--or I will send you to the office!” backs the student into a corner. The student
cannot comply without appearing to have done so merely to avoid the threatened
disciplinary consequence (that is, prompt compliance would probably result in Rashid's
losing face with his peers). The teacher might instead use this face-saving alternative:
"Rashid, please take out your book now and pay attention. We need to make sure that
you do well on the upcoming test so that you continue to be eligible to play on the lacrosse
team. They need your talent!"

Act in positive ways that are inconsistent with the student’s expectations (Fisher, et al.,
1991). Because they have experienced so many disappointments in school,
confrontational students may believe that teachers do not take a personal interest in them
or value their classroom contributions. You can surprise these students and begin to forge
more positive relationships by showing through your actions that you do indeed value
them. You might, for example, occasionally bring in articles from popular magazines on
topics that you know will interest the student, set aside time for weekly individual
conferences to be sure that the student understands and is making progress on all
assignments, or take a couple of minutes each day to engage the student in social
conversation. Each small 'random act of kindness' will probably not instantly change a
teacher-student relationship. Over time, however, such acts will demonstrate your
empathy and caring--and are likely to have a cumulative, powerful, and positive impact on
the student.

Select fair behavioral consequences in advance (Walker & Walker, 1991). When you are
face-to-face with a confrontational student, it can be a challenge to remain impartial and
fair in choosing appropriate consequences for misbehavior. Instead, take time in advance
to set up a classwide menu of positive consequences for good behaviors and negative
consequences for misbehavior. Be sure that all students understand what those
consequences are. Then be consistent in applying those consequences to individual cases
of student misbehavior.

Avoid making task demands of students when they are upset. Students will be much more
likely to become confrontational if you approach them with a task demand at a time when
they are already frustrated or upset. When possible, give agitated students a little
breathing room to collect themselves and calm down before giving them commands
(Walker & Walker, 1993).

References
New York: Penguin.

Publishing Company.

Morrow.

teachers. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.
Behavior Report Card

Student: ________________________________________________

Teacher: __________________ Classroom: _________________

Directions: Review each of the Behavior Report Card items below. For each item, rate the degree to which the student showed the behavior or met the behavior goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Target</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>Th</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student focused his or her attention on teacher instructions, classroom lessons and assigned work.</td>
<td>1/1/___</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select the degree to which the goal was met:</td>
<td>1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9</td>
<td>Never/Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usually/Always</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student sat in class without fidgeting or squirming more than most peers.</td>
<td>1/1/___</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select the degree to which the goal was met:</td>
<td>1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9</td>
<td>Never/Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usually/Always</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student remembered academic instructions and directions without needing extra reminders.</td>
<td>1/1/___</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select the degree to which the goal was met:</td>
<td>1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9</td>
<td>Never/Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usually/Always</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student refrained from repetitive motor behaviors (e.g., table-tapping) and did not play with objects during academic or work time.</td>
<td>1/1/___</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
<td>_____ Pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select the degree to which the goal was met:</td>
<td>1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9</td>
<td>Never/Seldom</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Usually/Always</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>