



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

by Michael Linsin on August 15, 2015

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

It takes little if any preparation time.

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

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

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

You see, one of the best things you can do on [the first day of school](#) is set the bar of what is normal far above what your students are used to. Far above what your colleagues are doing. Far above what most teachers mean when they use the term "high expectations."

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

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

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

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

### **How It Works**

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

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

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

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

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

Here's how:

### **You Model**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It also saves time and allows you to be a *teacher* rather than a [micromanager](#).

### **Student Models**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **More Model**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **All Model**

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

Emphasize politeness as they work around each other to hang up hats and maneuver around desks. "Good morning," "please," and "excuse me" should be the predominant communication during the opening routine. You're only job during this time is to observe, saying as little as possible.

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

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

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

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

*Note:* Although you'll want to practice until they get it right, it's okay to take a break and revisit the routine later in the day – or the next. [Repetition](#), after all, isn't a bad word.

### **It Starts Now**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It starts now.

It starts with this simple 20-minute lesson.