

How To Avoid Losing Your Students' Attention

November 10, 2018 by Michael Linsin

There is a phenomenon I see again and again in the classrooms I visit.

As attention starts to wane . . .

- Eyelids droop.
- Fingers tap.
- Bodies sigh.

. . . the teacher will speed up their instruction.

They'll talk and move faster as if trying to finish before completely losing the class.

But this is a big mistake – because it only makes things worse.

Here's why:

It's boring.

The urge to rush and get done quickly will inevitably cause you to gloss over details, which are *the most important element* in making your lessons interesting.

Without them, your classroom turns into a snooze fest. To the degree you talk and move rapidly, your students will become bored and uninterested.

It's harder to follow.

When you speed up your lessons, you make it difficult for students to follow along. They have to strain just to listen and process the information.

Which, for all but the most dedicated students, becomes frustrating and not worth the effort.

And as soon as they check out, the overwhelming desire to talk and move and be anywhere but sitting in your classroom takes hold.

It causes excitability.

Talking faster is a sure recipe for excitability, which is one of the biggest causes of misbehavior. It incites restlessness and nervousness and the compulsion to search for something – anything – that can capture their attention.

So they glance around the room. They squirm and fidget and turn to their classmates.

The non-stop talking from their teacher also provides cover to begin talking, playing, and disrupting the class.

It signals that it's time to move on.

Speeding up acts as a triggering mechanism. It signals to students that you're wrapping it up, which **causes them to move on** mentally, and sometimes physically, to the next activity.

Once they *think* they know what you want them to do, they're gone. They tune the rest out.

Predictably, when you send them off to work independently, it doesn't go well. Hands go up all over the room and they ask about the very things you just covered.

What To Do Instead

When you notice attention waning – or, better yet, to avoid ever losing your students’ attention – slow down and [focus on details](#).

For example, if you’re showing your students how to put their science samples into a ziplock bag, include *everything* they need to know to succeed . . . plus a little extra.

Go over the size and shape of the bag as well as how the sealing mechanism works. Demonstrate the most efficient way to slide the samples in – how to shape their hand, manipulate their fingers or grip the tool, and position the bag.

Model how to hold it, label it, and place it precisely on the sample table. You may even tell a story about how a man named Steven Ausnit developed the plastic zipper in the 1950s.

Details, you see, are interesting.

They’re compelling and fascinating and pull students so deep into the lesson that they forget where they are. They lose track of time, their classmates, and even the environment around them.

Their world becomes just you, the lesson, and their whirring, captivated mind.