

## How To Handle A Student Who Questions You With Disrespect

By Michael Linsin on October 7, 2017

It's among the most requested topics we have yet to cover.

How do you handle a student who questions you, your decisions, or the way you run your classroom?

How do you respond when you *know* their motives are less than pure?

When you know they're just trying to get under your skin.

Or worse, trying to get the class to turn against you.

The "question" usually comes out of left field, catching you off guard.

It's almost always public, confrontational, and in the form of a challenge:

*"Why can't we just leave our seats when we feel like it?"*

*"Why do we have to be silent while we work?"*

*"Don't you think it's mean to make us do our essays over and over again?"*

With more than a tinge of attitude, [the student is clearly being disrespectful](#). But because it's cloaked in the guise of a question, enforcing a consequence straightaway would likely only add fuel to their fire.

It would only prove their point—in their mind, anyway, as well as in front of the class—that you're mean and unfair.

On the other hand, it's hard to know what to say. It's hard not to come across as angry, flustered, or defensive. So how should you handle it?

Here's how in three easy steps:

### **1. Defer**

It's best not to respond to their question — at least not right away. Instead, defuse the tension in the room by deferring your answer to a later time.

Say, "I appreciate your question, but now's not a good time. Let's finish this lesson first, and when I get a chance, we can talk."

Then move on as if nothing happened. Refuse to give them the forum to air their grievances or drag you into an argument in front of the class.

### **2. Wait**

Wait at least twenty minutes before approaching the student. This way, you give them a chance to calm down and rethink the manner in which they posed their question.

Waiting also shifts control of the situation to you.

During this time, it's important to formulate a simple, direct, and honest response that demonstrates how the rule or policy in question benefits *them* — as well as every student in the class.

### **3. Approach**

Avoid pulling the student aside for a private chat or otherwise making the situation bigger and more important than it is.

Just approach them where they are, smile, and deliver your prepared line:

*"You must **raise your hand** before leaving your seat because it protects every student from disruption. It's also best for learning."*

*“We must be quiet while we’re working because every student has a right to concentrate without interruption.”*

*“Rewriting is an important part of the writing process that will improve your essay and make you a better writer.”*

Follow up with another smile and a quick, “Now get back to work.” Then turn and be on your way.

### **The Importance of Why**

The three-step strategy will defuse tension and hostility, allow you to take control of the situation, and provide an effective response to their question.

It will reinforce the message that you know what you’re doing and that you base your decisions on what’s best for them.

Handling it this way is honest.

It’s clear and true and reestablishes the roles of student and teacher. It also effectively eliminates future challenges to your authority.

However, it’s important to note that the incident itself is a sign that you’re not adequately [explaining the why of what you do](#).

#### **Why is so important.**

Because when your students know why they must work silently or raise their hand or rewrite essays, or follow any other rule, policy, or procedure .

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They’re far more willing, and even eager, to go along with it.