



## How To Handle Sloppy Routines As The School Year Winds Down

By Michael Linsin

At this time of year, it isn't unusual for routines to become sloppy.

Your students, after all, are growing tired of the grind. The pressures of testing weigh heavily. Morning songbirds remind them that summer is near.

Despite faithfully following the [do-it-again strategy](#), your students just aren't as sharp as they once were.

They take longer to get in line.

They talk, meander, and daydream through transitions. They go through the motions like they're headed for the salt mines, hardhat and lunch pail in tow.

Now, normally we recommend re-teaching routines at the first sign of trouble. We recommend modeling and practicing them as if it were the first day of school.

But in this case, so late in the year, there is a more effective approach.

You see, by May even your most enthusiastic re-teaching can lose its mojo. *"Yeah, yeah, we know how to walk to the library. Do we really need to go over it again?"*

As long as your students know *what* to do, there is no reason to cover well-trodden ground. There is no reason to drag them out into the hallway as they roll their eyes and mutter under their breath.

Although the strategy I want to share with you doesn't involve re-teaching, it does involve showing your students how to perform those same routines in a whole new way.

This is an important distinction – and the reason why it's effective.

You see, when you tweak a single component of a routine in a way that makes it feel fresh and different, it has an odd way of transforming the entire attitude of the class.

There are any number of ways to do this, which we'll be sure to cover in future articles, but the easiest way is to simply increase the speed or pace of your routines.

In other words, while the steps your students take while performing a given routine would be exactly the same, you would ask them to do it twice as fast – or **double-time**.

Now, it's important to note that double-time doesn't mean running. It doesn't mean cutting in front of others, forgetting their manners, or racing to see who is first.

It just means that they're going to perform the routine a notch quicker than they have in the past. It's akin to fast-forwarding a video. The steps are the same. It's just done at an enhanced pace.

To begin, it's best to choose a routine that is most emblematic of their struggles. By adjusting your expectations of just this one routine, the others will fall into place with a simple reminder.

The first step is to show your students what double-time looks like. Go ahead and model how to line up, for example, only do so at a more lively tempo.

After modeling once or twice, [choose a single student](#) to mimic your moves and pace. Next, choose a few more to try it. By asking individual students to demonstrate first, you prove that it can be performed exactly as taught.

After asking if there is anyone who *doesn't* know what to do, have the entire class practice.

As long as their sloppiness was due to spring fatigue, and not a sign [you're losing control of your class](#), you'll notice marked, if not stunning, improvement.

Although doubling the speed of your routines is a good rule of thumb, you can always opt for just *slightly* faster. Any change that asks more of your students will do the trick.

The truth is, in most classrooms routines are performed far too slow. And when a routine doesn't go well, when students are distracted and unfocused, teachers tend to slow the pace down even more.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, the solution is the opposite.

Increasing the tempo works because it infuses purpose, urgency, and novelty into something that has grown tired and stale. The idea is to move each day along brisk and popping, all the way up to the final bell.

This forces students into a position of looking forward, always challenged, and leaning toward the next goal on the horizon.

Speeding up routines is a simple tweak.

A slight calibration of your expectations.

But it makes all the difference.