



## How To Manage Voice Levels In Your Classroom

Like so much of classroom MANAGEMENT, the key to managing voice levels is to define for your students what you expect of them – and then hold them to it.

Your students need to know during every minute of the school day whether it's an allowable time to talk, who they're free to talk with, and what volume level is appropriate.

This can run the gamut from no talking whatsoever to unrestrained expression.

For example, over the short course of a morning, your students may be collaborating with group members at a conversational intensity, whispering to a neighbor while prepping for a science experiment, or working in silence.

They may even be yelling and cheering as part of an outdoor game.

The idea is to standardize a few simple volume levels for your classroom, teach them to your students, and then clarify for each activity which level is appropriate. For example, before releasing your students to work on an art project, you might say simply, "We are working at a level two."

Although you can certainly create your own number-level system, what follows is one that is easy to use and already proven to work.

### **0 - no talking**

This level is defined as having no communication with fellow classmates. It should be in play during silent reading or whenever your students are working independently.

### **1 - whispering**

Whispering is appropriate for use in the school library or during semi-independent work periods – that is, when you prefer your students be able to consult quietly with a neighbor.

### **2 - conversation**

This is a speaking level for meeting in pairs and small groups. It requires a respect and awareness of others engaged in similar but distinct conversations around them.

### **3 - have fun**

Appropriate for use during outdoor activities and sports and perhaps even some indoor learning games. The sheer exuberance of this level helps define the other three.

## **A Few Thoughts**

Some teachers prefer to define voice levels by proximity. In other words, they'll ask students to speak in 12-inch or 36-inch voices, for example. But

this can be confusing to students and difficult to define – especially considering the phenomenon that transpires at level two.

When students meet in small groups, it's normal for voices to gradually grow louder as they try and talk above the groups around them. This happens to adults as well as children and is a natural consequence of group learning.

Getting angry and lecturing in response is a mistake that discourages wonderful and beneficial collaboration and learning. As long as your students are on topic, it's okay if voices get a little loud. Really.

If ever it becomes distracting, however, and begins interfering with your students' ability to work together, simply stop and ask for their attention. Pause 30 seconds or so and then lead them through a few deep breaths.

In most circumstances, this brief clearing of the boards, and perhaps a quick reminder, is all they need to recalibrate their voices to a more pleasant level.

Whispering, however, is a different story.

There is no natural phenomenon at work when students stop whispering and begin using normal speaking voices. In this case, and in any case of straying from a designated level, just [follow your classroom management plan](#).

*"Jake, you broke rule number one and didn't follow my directions for speaking at level one. You have a warning."*

Many students, however, may not fully understand how to whisper or how to speak when someone is sitting right in front of them. They may not grasp that no talking really does mean no talking.

Therefore, it's important – and only fair – to thoroughly teach, model, and role-play each level before putting the strategy into practice. Show your students in [a highly detailed way](#) how to interact and behave within each level and then let them try it out.

Create common classroom scenarios and let them rehearse – one level after the other. Challenge and test your class, mixing and matching groups and levels until they prove to you they fully understand what you expect.

Although it's a small part of classroom management, managing voice levels is another layer, another simple but effective strategy that helps keep your students calm and happy and focused on learning.

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