

Tech Snacks: Classroom Management

Effective classroom management isn't something that just happens naturally – it requires the intentional use of non-verbal communication, instructor personality, classroom policy, and many other subtle factors.

Project confidence

Your breathing, stance, speaking pace, eye contact, vocal inflection/tone, and mobility in the classroom all convey something about your level of confidence to your students.¹ But what if you don't actually feel that confident in front of them? Changing even one of these elements of your presentation style can make a difference. If you walk into your classroom believing that it is going to be unruly and out of control, the students are likely to sense your fear and fulfill that prophecy.

- Breathe deeply and take your time.
- Take an expansive stance.
- Speak slowly and lower your voice.
- Make more eye contact than you think you need to.
- Make a conscious effort to move around the room. Don't hide behind the podium!
- Check in with yourself on your use of nonverbal cues every few weeks, especially when you're stressed.

Plan ahead to manage transitions

Transitions tend to invite disruption. Establishing a routine or signal to help students navigate instructional shifts can help prevent distractions. For instance, when moving between lecture and group work, you might have a particular word you say, hand signal you use, or image you display to help them quickly understand the task that is expected.

Intervene sooner rather than later

It may seem out of place to talk about "behavior problems" at the college level — aren't we all adults here? You might be inclined to just ignore bad behavior, but letting it fly can often exacerbate the problem. Below are some categories of interventions that can help stop the situation from escalating.

Record behaviors. If you notice a student coming in late, falling asleep, distracting others, or being disrespectful, write it down. If it happens just once, it may be an isolated situation. If the behavior continues, communicate the pattern with the student, along with your expectations for improvement.

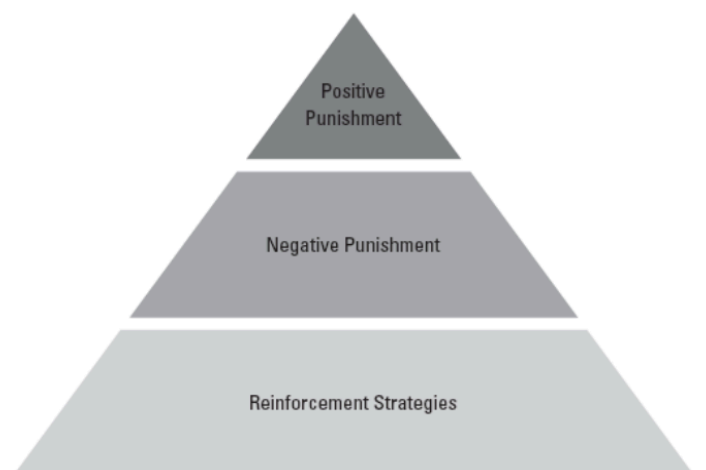
Behavior management

This pyramid below displays the most effective correction strategies from bottom to top.²

Reinforcement Strategies

"Reinforcement" in this context means *encouraging* desirable behaviors in the classroom. These can be thought of primarily as preventative strategies.

Practice "precorrection." If you notice the same issues occurring semester after semester, create clear policies to mitigate them, and communicate those to your students from day one. As you approach those areas of instruction where you anticipate behavior issues, be very clear and explicit to students about the *positive*, acceptable behaviors you expect to see in the upcoming moments.



¹ Adapted from: <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/misbehavior-college-classroom/>

² Harlacher, Jason E. *Designing Effective Classroom Management*, Marzano Research Lab, 2015.

Alternatively, have students discuss or write down the expectations they think the instructor has about the upcoming event.

Distract the distractor. When a student or group of students is out of line, make eye contact and ask them a question relevant to the lesson (but avoid sarcasm and snarkiness).

Rotate partners. If students are engaging in off-task behavior together during partner work, consider “randomly” assigning partners by numbering them off or having them draw playing cards torn in half. Bonus: Students often stay in place after group work is over.

“Negative” or “Positive” Punishment

In this context, negative refers to the removal of privileges and positive refers to some additional task or responsibility that you will give them.

Write a note. If you’re conflict averse or find it hard to catch students after class, consider writing them a note about your observations, expectations, and potential consequences. Hand it to them while you’re handing back homework to avoid embarrassment.

Have a talk. Pull the student aside after class and communicate your observations and expectations about their behavior in your class. Let them know the specific consequences that they can expect if they do not correct their behavior.

Take away privileges or points. You may need to let the student know that they will not be receiving participation points for the day or that they are not eligible for extra credit.

Ask them to reflect. As an additional assignment, have the student fill out a reflection that asks them to describe what happened and what they will do differently next time.

Require an apology note. If the student has caused offense or harm to another student, it may be appropriate to require them to write an apology note.

Have them bring donuts. If the offense is merely annoying verging on distracting and the class culture is right, a “fun” but subtle “punishment” may be appropriate. For instance, “Next time you’re late, you’re bringing donuts for the whole class.”

Other tips

Give students assignment options. Choice fosters ownership and buy-in.

Be truthful when things go wrong. If students are confused or frustrated, don’t pretend that things are going great. Adjust where you can, and ask for their perspectives.

Show students you care. Know their names and make references to their interests.

Observe your own teaching. OTLE can set up a video recording of your class so that you can get a sense of the way you use nonverbal cues in the classroom.

Document the Incident

Step 1: Submit a CARE Report. CARE Reports signify an “incident.” This will help document an incident in your classroom, whether it be academic or behavioral.

Step 2: Email the Assistant Dean of Students. She will coordinate with you to set up a meeting to discuss the incident and move forward with a formal investigation. Contact information:

Taryn Wallon, Assistant Dean of Students/Director of Residential Education

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