Australian Education Research Organisation

Classroom management skill

Clear communication

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Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This practice resource is part of a suite of foundational resources for beginning teachers, teachers working in new environments, or experienced teachers who want to refine or refresh specific elements of their classroom management practice. They can be used to individually reflect on and refine one's own practice, or as shared resources to support mentoring and other collaborative and whole-school approaches to improving classroom management.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s guidance is based on a synthesis of the most rigorous and relevant research evidence and guidance on classroom management from a wide range of research experts and expert practitioners across Australia and internationally.

Clear communication is a skill that supports and maintains positive student behaviour. Related practice resources to refine other skills focus on acknowledgement and praise, circulation, deliberately pausing, non-verbal correction, scanning and voice control.

Clear communication is the use of clear and concise language to set expectations, give instructions and address and correct behaviour. It models positive classroom talk that supports students to understand and do what is expected of them, whilst also supporting a positive classroom culture.

The importance of clear communication

Instructions and directions are given to students throughout each lesson. Students will develop a clearer understanding of classroom expectations when a small amount of information is presented at a time. Presenting too much information, too quickly, can lead to students experiencing cognitive overload. This increases the likelihood of students feeling confused because they have misunderstood what is expected of them or forgotten information.

Presenting instructions or directions using consistent language and regularly revisiting expectations supports students to understand what is expected of them and helps them to adopt positive behaviours.

Table 1: Examples of clear and less clear communication

Clear communication to support behaviour	Less clear communication
'Pens down, eyes facing the front. Thank you.'	'If you could put your pens down, make sure that you are facing this way and that your eyes are facing the front.'
'[Student name], equipment out, facing forward silently, ready to enter the room. Thank you.'	'[Student name], can you get your books and pencils out, turn around and face forward and stop talking while you're doing it. You need to be ready to go into the classroom in a moment.'
'Start with question one. Hand up if you need help. Thank you.'	'I'd like to see you all getting started on the worksheet, please. Let me know if you are stuck or need any help.'

Always interact with students with a calm tone, respect and politeness – for example, greeting students on first encounter and completing instructions with 'Thank you'. Positively frame communication, stating what students need to do rather than what they don't (that is, avoid using words like 'no' and 'don't'). This models respectful and polite interactions for students and creates a positive and supportive learning environment.

Rehearsing clear communication

It's helpful to rehearse communicating clearly without students present. The elements for success in this section provide a clear picture of effectively implementing this skill. They also provide a focus for feedback and reflection to improve your use of this skill.

Further guidance on effective rehearsal can be accessed in the Classroom Management Resources: User Guide.

Elements for success

Use as few words as possible while maintaining clarity

Break instructions down:

- into a small number of manageable steps
- in a sequential order
- so they are actionable for students

Deliberately pause and scan to ensure students understand and are following the instructions.

Rehearsing on your own

Write a script to clearly communicate behavioural instructions that are common in your classroom, for an individual student, a group of students or the whole class. Some examples of the situations you may like to script include:

- reminding students of your expectations for behaviour as they enter the classroom
- publicly or privately acknowledging students meeting behaviour expectations and praising students exceeding behaviour expectations specific to them, as you circulate the classroom
- addressing a group of students who are off-task and talking very loudly during collaborative work.

Read your script aloud. Record your rehearsal and self-assess using the elements for success. Repeat the rehearsal or rescript as necessary, until all elements for success have been demonstrated smoothly and with confidence.

Rehearsing with a colleague

Use the points from the Rehearsing on your own section to rehearse with a colleague, asking them to play the role of a student. Alternatively, review your recording with a colleague. Ask your colleague to provide feedback using the elements for success and identify:

- What went well?
- Which elements require refinement?

Rescript if necessary and rehearse again, incorporating feedback until all elements for success have been demonstrated smoothly and with confidence. Rehearsal will improve the clarity, conciseness and consistency of your language.

Practising clear communication during a lesson

To practise when students are present:

- Gain all students' attention before giving an instruction.
- Provide manageable, actionable steps in a sequential order to prevent adding unnecessary cognitive load while students are focused on their learning. For example, saying 'Pens down. Thank you' followed by 'Attention with me. Thank you'. Only combine instructions when they become habitual for students.
- Pause and scan to check that students understand and are following the instruction.
- Be consistent with your language when giving instructions to support students to become familiar with your expectations.

Ask a colleague to observe 10 to 15 minutes of a lesson, using the elements for success to identify the effectiveness of your use of clear communication and any areas for refinement.

Questions for reflection

- Do you provide instructions to students in manageable steps? Are the steps sequential?
- Are all students hearing and understanding your instructions? What could strengthen the students' responses?
- What impact is focusing on clear communication having on how your students respond to instruction?
- What aspect of your communication will you now focus on for further refinement?

For more practical guidance

AERO has developed a suite of resources to support teachers and school leaders to refine or refresh their foundational practices in creating safe and supportive learning environments through effective classroom management. You can read the Classroom Management Resources: User Guide for an overview of these resources and suggestions for their use.