

Classroom management practice guide

Students gaining teacher attention

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Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This practice guide 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.

This practice resource will support you in establishing methods for students to gain your attention to request assistance, ask a question or share information. This is important for creating a safe and supportive learning environment and minimising disruptions.

The number of students in a classroom means that a signal is needed to gain the teacher's attention rather than students calling out and moving around the room. Teaching, rehearsing, and reinforcing the signal students use to gain your attention will help to meet students' needs, manage interruptions to teaching and learning, and create a positive and supportive learning environment for all students.

Supporting students to gain your attention includes the following steps:

1. Monitor all students.
2. Have students use an agreed signal to gain your attention.
3. Acknowledge students.
4. Respond to students.

Supporting students to gain your attention and ask questions in class requires several skills, including acknowledgement and praise, circulation, clear communication, non-verbal correction and scanning.

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.

Effectively supporting students to gain your attention

1. Monitor all students

Consistently monitoring all students' behaviour demonstrates that you are aware of what is happening in your classroom, will provide support to students when needed and will reinforce behaviour expectations.

Monitor all students by regularly using a combination of pausing, scanning and circulating. Assist students when needed. Acknowledge students meeting behaviour expectations and praise students exceeding behaviour expectations specific to them. Respond to disengaged and disruptive behaviours, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

2. Have students use an agreed signal to gain your attention

Having an effective signal for students to gain your attention enables them to request assistance, ask a question or share information in a manner that is least disruptive to other students' learning. It's important to teach students a suitable signal for gaining your attention – for example:

- a hand signal, such as:
 - raising their hand
 - using fingers on their raised hand to indicate their need (that is, 1 finger in the air – 'I need to use the toilet', 2 fingers – 'I need to ask a question', 3 fingers – 'I am stuck').
- a physical object, such as:
 - paddle pop sticks or coloured cards on their desk (green – 'I'm ok', red – 'I'm stuck and need assistance', amber – 'I need assistance but can continue with other tasks')
 - holding up equipment such as a pencil to indicate the need to sharpen their pencil.

The signal needs to be taught and practised with students so they have the confidence to use it independently. Prior to starting a learning task, check for understanding by asking students to demonstrate the signal.

You may choose to teach your students to seek assistance from a neighbouring peer before seeking your assistance, enabling you to support other students. You can teach your students that this is suitable when they're not sure about something or need an item, such as an eraser.

3. Acknowledge students

Promptly and positively acknowledging a student's request for help lets them know you're aware they need assistance and will support them when you're able.

The expected acknowledgement should be taught to students at the same time as the signal to gain your attention. If the signal is students raising their hand, you might verbally acknowledge them – for example, 'I've seen your hand, [Name]. I'll come to you after I finish helping [Name]'. The student can continue their work doing what they can or wait quietly. To maintain the flow of instruction, you might use a non-verbal acknowledgement, such as making eye contact and nodding your head.

If students are using coloured cards or paddle pop sticks on their desks to indicate they need assistance, teach them that you will come to help them when you can and they must continue working on something they can do themselves or seek support from a neighbouring peer until then. It's important to be circulating and scanning to see the coloured cards early.

If students gain your attention using a signal for a request that doesn't require your assistance, such as going to the toilet or sharpening a pencil, you should be able to affirm or deny the request with a nod or shake of your head or a thumbs up or thumbs down without disturbing other students' learning.

4. Respond to students

It's important that when students ask for assistance or share something with you, the response is supportive and respectful. This helps build trust and connection.

When students require assistance, need to ask a question or share information and have used the signal to gain your attention, move to them as soon as possible. This may be after helping students who requested help first, in which case, it's important that students have been taught to continue their learning task as best they can, seek support from a neighbouring peer or wait quietly.

If many students require similar support, you may choose to gain whole-class attention or bring a small group of students together for further instruction.

Rehearse and practise students gaining your attention

Use the checklist for each step in the following section to identify your strengths and prioritise the step you will focus on first for rehearsal and practice. Focus on one step at a time until you can confidently demonstrate each item on the checklist.

Begin by scripting and rehearsing without students present. Consider filming your rehearsal and using the relevant checklist to review the recording yourself or with a colleague.

Then practise with students present. Record and review your practice alone or with a colleague using the relevant checklist, making sure to follow school or employer policies regarding recording students.

Invite a colleague to observe students gaining your attention in action. Ask them to use the checklists to provide feedback on what went well and to suggest one area for further improvement.

1. Monitor all students

Rehearse, then practise:

strategic positions around your classroom where you can see all students

deliberately pausing in those positions

scanning combined with deliberately pausing

circulating the classroom to:

- support students requiring clarification of an instruction or extra assistance
- acknowledge students meeting behaviour expectations
- praise students exceeding expectations specific to them
- respond to disengaged and disruptive behaviours, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

2. Have students use an agreed signal to gain your attention

Script, rehearse then practise teaching students:

to use a signal to gain your attention – for example, raising their hand, using fingers on their raised hand to indicate their need or using a physical object

what to do while they wait – for example, seek assistance from a neighbouring peer or work on something they can do

how to seek assistance from other students – for example, checking an instruction or borrowing equipment.

If students are to use physical objects such as coloured cards or paddle pop sticks on their desks, ensure these are prepared and available to the students.

3. Acknowledge students

Rehearse, then practice:

promptly and positively acknowledging students' requests for help:

- verbally – for example, 'I've seen your hand, [Name], and I'll come to you next'
- non-verbally – for example, nodding your head or giving a thumbs up.

4. Respond to students

Rehearse, then practise:

positioning yourself to see all students while providing assistance to one student

gaining whole-class attention for further instruction

temporarily grouping students with similar needs to provide assistance.

Questions for reflection

When you've refined and combined each of the steps for students gaining your attention, consider the following questions:

- What impact is having a clear signal for students to gain your attention having on students? How can you tell?
- How effectively have you modelled and practised the signal with students? Can you improve this further to support students in demonstrating the expected behaviour?
- What other skills and practices can you refine to further support students in gaining your attention in class?

Regularly revise students gaining teacher attention

Schedule points in the year to revise this practice for yourself and your students.

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.