

Classroom management explainer

Teaching routines

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Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This explainer 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 explainer focuses on teaching routines, describing how explicit teaching of routines provides structure, predictability and consistency to support student learning. Related explainers focus on [positive teacher–student relationships](#), [high expectations for behaviour](#) and [establishing and maintaining rules](#).

Routines are sequences of recurring tasks or actions, for example, [entering the classroom](#), designed and taught by the teacher and practised by students to become automatic (Lemov, 2021). Their efficient, productive and automatic execution reduces wasted learning time and helps to free up students' working memory to focus on learning.

To explicitly teach a routine:

1. Introduce the routine and briefly detail your expectations (why and what).
2. Model and describe the routine to your students by demonstrating the expected behaviours (I do).
3. Provide an opportunity for students to practise the routine with teacher support (we do).
Practise the routine until everyone can do it the best they can, acknowledging students who are getting it and supporting those who are not.

4. Students complete the routine independently (you do), removing scaffolding from the teacher, as appropriate, and transferring ownership to students.
5. Reinforce and maintain the routine consistently through [acknowledgement](#), [praise](#) and practice.

Adapted from Archer and Hughes (2011), Bennett (2020) and Lemov (2021)

The importance of teaching routines

Routines give students certainty about what is expected in the classroom by providing consistency, predictability and structure (AERO, 2021). Well-established routines enable students to independently follow them with little involvement from the teacher, reducing interruptions and increasing teaching time (Archer & Hughes, 2011). It's easier for students to decide how to behave when they are given clear sequences of the expected modelled behaviour (Bennett, 2020).

Explicitly teaching and modelling the expected behaviours of routines helps to free up students' working memory to focus on learning. To support students, a teacher should establish routines for specific tasks or times of the school day, such as entering the classroom, answering questions or transitioning between activities. Students who have learned the behaviours and routines expected of them, and had sufficient opportunities to practise to the point they become automatic, won't have to think about these things while focused on learning (Chaffee et al., 2017; Simonsen et al., 2008).

Teaching and maintaining routines

Routines should be [taught explicitly](#) to students, in the same way as curriculum content and skills. Teachers should identify routines that are necessary for their context, considering their students' needs, ages and the school's expectations.

Introduce specific routines the first time they are required, likely spread out over the first few weeks of school to avoid students feeling overwhelmed (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Explaining why a routine is required and its connection to behaviour expectations is key to establishing shared understanding (Bennett, 2020). Breaking a routine into a small number of discrete steps, and providing opportunities to revisit this and practise it over time, allows students to master the routine and commit it more easily to long-term memory (Lemov, 2021).

Students require support to learn and practise each step of a routine, as routines must be taught, rehearsed and reinforced in order to be learned (Lemov, 2021; Wong & Wong, 2018). Check students' understanding by modelling a routine correctly and incorrectly, and asking students to identify the differences (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Teachers can support students in understanding and successfully following classroom routines by providing [specific praise](#) and constructive feedback about expected behaviours. Routines can be displayed visually on the board or a poster to provide a reminder and a scaffold for students who need more time and ongoing guidance to learn and follow them. Teachers can also discuss what the routine 'looks like' and 'sounds like' with their students (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Mastering any behaviour takes practice. The more students practise, the better they get at it and the less they need to focus on this in ways that might distract from the content of their learning. Teachers need to allow time for students, and themselves, to become familiar with new routines (or time to relearn a routine that may have slipped).

Routines should be consistently monitored and regularly revised daily, weekly or monthly as needed.

Scenario

This scenario provides a practical example of the evidence summarised in this explainer. It provides insight into one teacher's approach to establishing and maintaining routines with a class to create a predictable, safe and supportive learning environment.

At the beginning of the new school year, Ms K. begins by teaching and practising various routines with her class. The routines include how students should enter and leave the classroom, ask for help, and pack up at the end of the lesson. These routines set the tone for expected behaviours in her classroom. She sets aside time to practise the routines with the class, monitoring and reinforcing how students carry them out and assisting students when needed.

During the year, she finds that her students continue to develop a clearer understanding of how to behave in her classroom, meaning she spends less time correcting disruptive behaviours and there is more time for teaching and learning. Her students even remind each other of the steps of their routines: 'Remember, we have to put our book away first' or 'Remember to put your hand up if you have a question'. Ms K. uses acknowledgement regularly when students follow routines – for example, she acknowledges her students following the lining-up routine by saying, 'Thank you, students, for lining up quietly'. She uses specific praise for students who exceed behaviours expected of them.

While most students master the routines, Ms K. recognises that some need occasional reminders. Recently, she has noticed delays with several students entering the classroom. To address this, she practises the entrance routine with the students again, modelling the steps and clearly communicating behaviour expectations. Re-teaching and practising the entrance routine will happen throughout the year when required. Investment of this time improves the routine, making for a smoother start to lessons and creating more time for learning.

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.

Further reading

For more information on teaching routines, read:

Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching*. Guildford Press. (pp. 121–129)

Bennett, T. (2020). *Running the room: The teacher's guide to behaviour*. John Catt Educational. (pp. 161–205)

Lemov, D. (2021). *Teach like a champion 3.0: 63 techniques that put students on the path to college*. Jossey-Bass. (pp. 385–417)

McCrea, P. (2020). *Motivated teaching*. Ingram Content Group. (pp. 57–67)

McDonald, T. (2019). *Classroom management: Engaging students in learning*. Oxford University Press. (pp. 122–130)

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2018). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher* (5th ed.). Harry K. Wong Publications. (pp. 138–196)

References

Archer, A. L., & Hughes, C. A. (2011). *Explicit instruction: Effective and efficient teaching*. Guildford Press.

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2021). *Focused classrooms: Managing the classroom to maximise learning*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/focused-classrooms-practice-guide/focused-classrooms-practice-guide-full-publication>

Bennett, T. (2020). *Running the room: The teacher's guide to behaviour*. John Catt Educational.

Chaffee, R. K., Briesch, A. M., Johnson, A. H., & Volpe, R. J. (2017). A meta-analysis of class-wide interventions for supporting student behavior. *School Psychology Review*, 46(2), 149–164. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-26745-001>

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Simonsen, B., Fairbanks, S., Briesch, A., Myers, D., & Sugai, G. (2008). Evidence-based practices in classroom management: Considerations for research to practice. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 31(3), 351–380. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-11490-005>

Wong, H. K., & Wong, R. T. (2018). *The first days of school: How to be an effective teacher* (5th ed.). Harry K. Wong Publications.