Practice guide for primary and secondary schools

Develop techniques and practices

Australian Education Research Organisation

Classroom management practice

Exiting the classroom

December 2023 | Updated November 2026



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 guide will support you in using an effective routine for leaving the classroom. This helps maintain a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment.

An exit routine at the end of a lesson provides a predictable and organised end to learning. It's important to plan dedicated time at the end of a lesson to ensure a consistent exit routine can take place every time students leave the classroom. Explicitly teach the routine and consider students' diverse backgrounds, experiences, neurodevelopmental profiles and needs to identify and provide adjustments and support. This includes providing visual supports or additional time and prompts as needed.

An effective exit routine requires the following steps:

End the lesson:

1. Wrap up the final learning task.
2. Gain all students' attention.
3. Remind all students of the expectations for finishing the lesson.
4. Monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations while students finish the lesson, providing support when needed.

Have students leave the classroom:

1. Position yourself to be able to see all students as they leave the classroom.
2. Gain all students' attention.
3. Remind all students of the expectations for leaving the classroom.
4. Dismiss students and monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations as they leave, including outside the classroom, providing support when needed.

This routine requires alignment with the whole-school approach, consideration of students' diverse needs and a range of skills, including acknowledgement and praise, circulation, clear communication, deliberately pausing, non-verbal correction, scanning and voice control.

When responding to student behaviour, always interact with students with a calm tone, respect and politeness – for example:

- using 'Please' and 'Thank you', and saying goodbye to students when leaving the classroom
- pausing before responding to disengagement or disruption to maintain and model your own emotional regulation, recognising that students' responses may reflect diverse needs, experiences or barriers that require additional supports and adjustments
- positively framing communication, stating what students are being asked to do rather than what they shouldn't do, so that they understand what's required of them. For example, providing the instruction 'Moving calmly and quietly, please' instead of 'Stop messing about.' This models respectful and polite interactions for students and creates a safe, supportive and inclusive learning environment.

An effective exit routine

1. Wrap up the final learning task

Having a clear end to a learning task provides students with an obvious point at which to stop and prepare to leave the classroom. Providing reminders and prompts for how long students have left to complete learning tasks and what they need to do before they finish allows students to use the remaining time to complete the task. It also helps them prepare to transition from the task, preventing possible frustration associated with an unexpected end to the activity.

Near the end of the learning task, using an assertive voice, clearly communicate how long students have before they need to stop. For example, 'Five minutes left to complete the [learning task] you're working on.' Provide regular, incremental reminders for how long students have left – for example, 'Five minutes to finish. Two minutes. Thirty seconds.' This can be supported by a visual support – such as a timer – so students can see how long they have left. Between each reminder, provide students with prompts or set targets for them to achieve – for example, 'You have two minutes left. Try to complete one more sentence.'

2. Gain all students' attention

Efficiently gaining all students' attention maximises instructional time and ensures all students – including those needing additional processing time or support – can access instructions and don't miss important information.

After the set time, stand where all students can see you and, with an assertive voice, gain all students' attention:

- using an audible prompt, supported by a visual cue, to indicate to students that they need to stop what they're doing, face you and listen in silence
- pausing and scanning to ensure students are looking and listening
- acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
- responding to students not giving you their full attention, acknowledging students when they do.

3. Remind all students of the expectations for finishing the lesson

It's important that you remind students of the expected safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours for finishing the lesson, so they understand what's required before they need to do it. By keeping the same expectations each time, students will become familiar with them and be more likely to demonstrate them.

With an assertive voice, clearly communicate to all students the expectations for preparing to leave the classroom, including:

- what they should do to finish the lesson, including putting items where they belong and rubbish in the bin
- what they need to prepare to take with them, if necessary
- how long they have
- where they should be when they've finished.

For example: 'You have one minute to put things where they belong, put rubbish in the bin and sit back at your desks. Thank you. Ready? Go.'

Use visual supports – such as a checklist on the board – to support student understanding and for students to refer to while they prepare to leave the classroom.

Check understanding of behaviour expectations – for example, by asking a small number of students to repeat the instructions with the whole class listening. If needed, clarify, demonstrate and provide support until all students understand what's expected.

4. Monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations while students finish the lesson, providing support when needed

It's important to monitor all students while they're finishing the lesson. This will ensure safety, and reinforce safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations while packing away, tidying up and preparing to leave the classroom. It will also demonstrate to students that you care about them, are aware of what's happening in your classroom and will provide adjustments and support when needed.

Prompt students to prepare to leave the classroom.

Scan and circulate the room to ensure all students are following directions. Assist students when needed.

Acknowledge and praise students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts – for example, 'Thank you [Name] for putting that paper in the recycling', 'Thank you, students, for caring for the classroom and our cleaners' or 'Great to see those students who are putting things back where they belong.'

Respond to behaviours that are unsafe, disengaged or disruptive with non-verbal or verbal corrections – for example, '[Name], quietly putting your sheet in your folder, please.' Acknowledge students when they correct their behaviour.

5. Position yourself to be able to see all students as they leave the classroom

Being able to see all students allows you to ensure student safety, provide assistance, acknowledge and praise students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts, and identify and promptly respond to any behaviour that is unsafe, disengaged or disruptive.

Move to a position close to the exit that allows you to see all students inside and outside the classroom.

6. Gain all students' attention

Gaining all students' attention after they've finished preparing to leave allows you to remind them of the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations for leaving the classroom and reduces the likelihood of students missing important information.

In the position identified in the previous step, with an assertive voice, gain all students' attention:

- using an audible prompt, supported by a visual cue, to indicate to students that they need to stop what they're doing, face you and listen in silence
- pausing and scanning to ensure students are looking and listening
- acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
- responding to students not giving you their full attention, acknowledging when they do.

7. Remind all students of the expectations for leaving the classroom

It's important that you remind students of the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations for leaving the classroom, so they understand what's required before needing to demonstrate the routine.

Ensure students have met the expectations for finishing the lesson and thank them.

With an assertive voice and stance, acknowledge and praise students for their attention and effort in the lesson, session or day, and clearly communicate to all students the expectations for leaving the classroom. This includes:

- what they need to take with them, if necessary
- what they need to complete or bring for next time
- how they should leave the classroom.

For example – 'Thank you for your focus and effort today. I've read some excellent paragraphs. Please remember to bring your homework tomorrow. When I say your row, I would like you to quietly and calmly walk out of the room. Thank you.'

Check understanding of behaviour expectations – for example, by asking a small number of students to repeat the instructions with the whole class listening. If needed, clarify, demonstrate and provide support until all students understand what's expected.

8. Dismiss students and monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations as they leave, including outside the classroom, providing support when needed

Consistently monitoring all students while they're leaving the room and outside the classroom demonstrates to them that you care about them, are aware of what's happening and will provide support when needed. It also enables you to reinforce safe, respectful behaviour expectations.

Prompt students to leave the room in a safe, orderly manner – for example, prompting the group sitting nearest the door to leave first. Consider students who may benefit from leaving the room first or last. For example, students with sensory sensitivities may benefit from leaving at a particular time to reduce exposure to high-traffic areas and support a more regulated transition.

Say goodbye to students by name as they leave the classroom to help build positive connections. This also provides an opportunity to acknowledge and praise individual students' efforts in the lesson, session or day and give brief individual reminders – for example, needing to complete a homework activity or needing to bring something next time.

Continually scan all students inside and outside as they leave. Assist students when needed.

Acknowledge and praise students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts 'Thank you, back row, for exiting calmly and quietly', 'Thank you, students, for waiting quietly while …' or 'Great to see those students who have their [object] with them ready to take.'

Respond to behaviours that are unsafe, disengaged or disruptive with a non-verbal correction (such as a look or a gesture) or a verbal correction (such as 'Remember, [Name], quietly moving out' or '[Name], go back to your desk and try walking out again, giving space to others who are also leaving'). Acknowledge students when they correct their behaviour.

When all students have left the room, position yourself outside the classroom to continue scanning all students as they leave the area, providing assistance when needed.

Thank students for their safe, respectful behaviours and efforts as they leave the area. Provide specific feedback on anything that could be refined, and practise again if needed.

Rehearse and practise your exit routine

Before you begin to rehearse and practice, identify the school expectations and your class expectations (aligned with the school expectations) for students leaving the classroom.

What safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours do you want to see? What particular behaviours do you want to understand and address?

Identify what will work best for your context and students' specific needs – for example, certain students first or last, row by row or table by table.

Use the checklist for each step in the following section to identify your strengths and prioritise the step you'll 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 planning, scripting and rehearsing without students present, then practise with students present.

Invite a colleague to observe your exit routine. Ask them to use the observation tool to record the observation and provide feedback on what went well and to suggest one area for further improvement.

1. Wrap up the final learning task

- [ ] Explicitly plan time to be able to effectively conduct your exit routine. This time may get shorter the more the procedure becomes automatic for students.

Script, rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] clearly communicating the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations and amount of time for students finishing the learning task, including providing regular verbal, and visual incremental reminders of what they need to do in the time remaining.

2. Gain all students' attention

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] gaining all students' attention by using an audible prompt supported by a visual cue
- [ ] deliberately pausing
- [ ] scanning all students
- [ ] acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
- [ ] responding to students not giving you their attention, acknowledging students when they do.

3. Remind all students of the expectations for finishing the lesson

Rehearse, then practise clearly communicating what students need to do to finish the lesson and prepare to leave the classroom:

- what they should do to pack away and tidy up
- what they need to prepare to take with them
- how long they have
- where they should be when they've finished preparing to leave

- [ ] using as few words as possible while maintaining clarity
- [ ] breaking instructions down:
  - into a small number of manageable steps
  - in a sequential order
  - so they're actionable for students
- [ ] deliberately pausing and scanning to ensure students understand and are following the instructions.

Consider how you might complement verbal instructions with visual supports for students to refer to, especially for multi-step instructions.

4. Monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations while students prepare to leave the classroom, providing support when needed

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] a strategic position where you can see all students
- [ ] deliberately pausing in your strategic position
- [ ] scanning combined with deliberately pausing
- [ ] circulating the classroom to:
  - support students requiring clarification of an instruction, extra assistance or an adjustment
  - acknowledge and praise students safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
  - respond to disengagement and disruption, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

Rehearse, then practise gaining all students' attention and re-setting expectations for safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour when needed.

5. Position yourself to be able to see all students as they leave the classroom

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] standing where you'll be able to see all students leaving the classroom (likely just inside the entrance to your classroom). Your position should:
  - ensure you don't have blind spots that need to be monitored
  - allow you to scan and see all students inside and outside the classroom as they leave
  - change as needed for different classrooms or classes.

6. Gain all students' attention

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] gaining all students' attention by using an audible prompt supported by a visual cue
- [ ] deliberately pausing
- [ ] scanning all students
- [ ] acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts
- [ ] responding to students not giving you their full attention, acknowledging students when they do.

7. Remind all students of the expectations for leaving the classroom

Rehearse, then practise clearly communicating the expectations for leaving the classroom:

- [ ] acknowledging students' attention and effort during the lesson, session or day
- [ ] clearly communicating the safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviour expectations for students leaving the classroom:
  - what they need to take with them
  - what they need to complete or bring for next time
  - how they should leave the classroom
- [ ] checking for understanding.

8. Dismiss students and monitor and reinforce the behaviour expectations as they leave, including outside the classroom, providing support when needed

Rehearse, then practise:

- [ ] instructing students to leave the classroom
- [ ] scanning inside and outside the classroom as students leave
- [ ] interacting positively with students, such as saying goodbye to students by name
- [ ] acknowledging and praising students' safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and efforts throughout the lesson, session or day and giving reminders to individual students for homework or the next lesson
- [ ] positively framed verbal corrections – for example, a whole-class reminder of expectations or a quick correction responding to behaviours that are unsafe, disengaged or disruptive, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

Questions for reflection

When you've refined each of the steps in this guide, consider the following questions:

- Are you planning adequate time to effectively end your lesson and implement your exit routine? If not, how can you address this?
- How confident do you feel now in implementing all steps of an exit routine?
- What changes have you noticed in how students finish lessons and exit the learning environment as a result of your end-of-lesson and exit routine?
- How are you supporting students in demonstrating safe, respectful, learning-focused behaviours when preparing to leave and exiting the classroom? Could they be further supported by visual supports, additional processing time, prompts and reminders or opportunities for practice?
- Is this routine automatic for students? What else can you do to make it automatic?
- When will you review (and reteach if necessary) the routine for exiting the classroom? How will you know that you need to do this?



Regularly revise your exit routine

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

For more guidance

The following resources in AERO's classroom management suite provide practical guidance and support related to an exit routine.

Explainer

- teaching routines

Video

- exiting the classroom

Reflection resource

- exiting the classroom

Practice guides

- planning for classroom management
- responding to low-level disengaged and disruptive behaviours
- supporting a colleague with refining their practice (and accompanying observation tool)

Professional learning resources

- facilitation guide
- evidence-based approaches slide deck
- our whole-school approach slide deck
- practical refinement: gaining all students' attention

CC BY 4.0, excluding image p. 1: iStock.com/davidf. This publication was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education through the Engaged Classrooms Through Effective Classroom Management Program.