Just the FAQs Please

Q. What are some ways to use routines in the classroom to establish order and manage all that must be done?

A. Numerous housekeeping tasks in the classroom can be streamlined with routines and procedures. A common process for collecting homework, for example, requires students entering class to drop completed assignments into a box placed by the classroom door. Once learned by students, these routines help a class run smoothly, maximize instruction time, and help prevent discipline problems.

To create your routines, list daily, weekly, and monthly tasks required in your classroom, such as taking attendance and lunch count, handing in homework, passing out various papers, and sharpening pencils. For each task, develop a process that is to be carried out each time. Soon, various tasks will fit seamlessly into the daily routine.

A card system lets you take attendance and lunch count effortlessly. You will need index and “pocket cards” (similar to the ones libraries place in books to hold return-date cards). Using a pocket card for each student, place the cards in alphabetical order on a board or wall. Below these cards, hang two to three pockets for color-coded index cards that represent the school’s counting system—buying lunch, brought lunch, and milk only, for example. The student process for using these cards becomes part of the students’ morning routine and allows lunch count and attendance to be taken at a glance. The routine includes students putting away their coats, choosing the appropriate card, and placing it in their name pocket. A pocket without a card indicates that the child is absent.

Routines and procedures lessen behavior problems at transition times. Consider when you change from one activity to another in your classroom, such as lining up, changing subjects, group work, or trips to the media center. Reflect on methods to structure each transition. A specific morning routine lets students know what is expected of them and establishes habits immediately. When students enter the room, they can place their jackets, lunches, and backpacks in the designated areas, turn in homework, sit down, and begin their morning work.

If you’ve been overwhelmed by all the little tasks involved in running a classroom, perhaps you are not letting students help enough. Typically, students consider helping in the classroom a privilege. Rotate helpers regularly to give all students an opportunity to participate. Once the first student helpers learn their jobs, they can train the newcomers. Your burden becomes lighter, and students gain a sense of belonging in the class. Student jobs could include paper passers, lunch-count monitor, pencil sharpener, line leader, office monitor, board cleaner, and pet caretaker.

Be sure to teach routines to students clearly and consistently from the first day of school. Review and reinforce these expectations as needed throughout the year.

Q. Are homework assignments essential? I’m not sure that my students get much out of homework and I’ve read conflicting reports about its value.

A. Homework is beneficial for students, teachers, and parents. It is a great way for students to reinforce and practice previously learned concepts and to explore various topics.
in-depth. Though you probably couldn’t prove it by their reactions to it, homework helps students develop a positive attitude toward school and a love for lifelong learning.

Teachers benefit when they use homework results to assess students’ knowledge and plan the next instructional steps. For example, they may design short-range assignments that will meet the learning styles of all students based on feedback from home assignments. Homework provides another opportunity to review and reinforce previously learned concepts.

Furthermore, homework familiarizes parents with curriculum studies and standards around which they could plan educational family outings to museums, plays, and cultural events that support and reinforce assignments. Through home assignments, parents and children spend quality time together participating in authentic learning experiences that reinforce the idea that learning also takes place at home.

Homework can be a positive part of the educational process. Maximize home-study time and avoid the homework blues by having students use the following checklist.

**My Homework Guide**

- Clarify assignment directions and expectations (format, due date) before the end of the school day.
- Ask the teacher to complete a sample math problem or show an example of the assigned project.
- Find out the grading criteria or rubric.
- Refer to their assignment notebook at the end of class to gather necessary texts and supplies for home assignments.
- Choose a study buddy to call for clarification of assignments.
- Write short- and long-range projects in an assignment notebook.
- Write long-range assignments on a monthly calendar to post at home.
- Set a study schedule for home that includes time for after-school activities, downtime, snacks, and chores, and follow it.
- Create a study area and homework survival kit. Gather necessary supplies—reference books, graph paper, construction paper, pencils, pens, crayons, rulers, calculators, compass, glue sticks—for an uninterrupted block of study time.
- Study in a quiet, well-lit place.
- Ask for guidance when needed.
- Check that assignments are complete, neat, and that all directions were followed.
- Place homework in a book bag near the door or in an area designated for school materials.

Tip from Theresa

Do you have trouble remembering those questions and comments from people you pass in the hallway on the way to the office or your classroom? Help your brain remember them. Travel the hallway with a pen and a small pad of paper that has been hole-punched for your planner. Place this pad of paper in an obvious place—by the door or next to your planner—so you don’t forget it. Take it with you whenever you leave your room. When you get stopped in the hallway, jot down key words to jog your memory. To avoid losing the note, put it in your planner as soon as you return to your class. For PDA users: take your PDA with you when you leave your room.

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