

**FOR TEACHERS**

# How to create a learner-centered environment



Your classroom's climate can either enhance learning or serve as a barrier to learning. From day one, you set the tone for the year ahead. Begin by creating a learner-centered environment:

- Involve students in the decision-making process.
- Help students structure the curriculum to meet their interests.
- Stimulate their love of learning.

Here are some ideas that will help you create a student-centered classroom right from the beginning of the school year.

# The learner-centered classroom

## Starting the year out right

Teaching is hard professional work. Creating the learning environment and planning and implementing the organizational systems for you, your students and your classroom is very complex.

The following suggestions will assist you in organizing your thinking and planning procedures that will help create a student-centered environment as you begin the school year.

### Beginning your class

Think about the following:

- How you want students to enter and leave your classroom.
- What information you want on the board so students begin to work immediately.
- The type of seating arrangement and configuration that you will use (assigned seats, open seating, cooperative group seating).
- How you want to get your students' attention to start the class (the school bell system, a raised hand signal).
- How your students behave during the public address announcements.



## Establishing rules together

Creating a positive classroom climate is critical for learning. Teachers and students should develop positive statements about how they will work together in the classroom and cultivate mutual respect between students and teacher.

Develop rules in the form of a classroom compact or constitution. Be sure that the guidelines are consistent with your school's policies and procedures and that they are in the interest of student learning.



### Rules need to be:

- 3-5 in number to start the year (more may be added as the need arises)
- Positively stated
- Clear and specific
- Based on observable behavior
- Enforceable

### Steps in teaching rules

- Present rules as needed
- Explain/demonstrate/model
- Discuss rationale and application
- Allow time for students to practice
- Provide feedback
- Review/re-teach

### Consequences

Teachers should develop a range and hierarchy of consequences that match the frequency, intensity and reason for any misbehavior. The consequences should move students back into a learning mode rather than remove them from the learning environment.

Engage students who are misbehaving in problem-solving activities. Avoid win-lose situations, threats, or consequences that you can not carry out.

Remember — be sure consequences are relevant to the behavior; make sure you can “live with” them; ensure they are enforceable; and always state them in a calm voice.

## Consequences work best when they:

- Are clear and specific
- Have a range of alternatives
- Include a reminder
- Include a warning (or second reminder)
- Include a conference with student
- Include a contract with the student
- Include a conference with parent and/or administrator
- Are not punishments
- Are natural and/or logical (related to the behavior)

**Example** — For homework not completed on time, the logical consequence would be to have the student lose points versus sending the student to the principal's office.

## Classroom management

Manage the classroom and students using guidance rather than oversight. This style emphasizes caring and cooperation and promotes student self-discipline. It encourages students to think for themselves and to help each other.

Develop student self-discipline over time, based on learning from one's own experiences, including mistakes — those “teachable moments.” Foster responsibility, not obedience, by allowing students to help with daily classroom business.

Be specific and clear in directions. Have well-established classroom procedures. Avoid periods of delay at the beginning of class, between activities and at the end of class.



### Points to consider:

- How and when students may leave their seats.
- How students obtain permission to leave the room (individual passes, room pass, teacher's permission).
- How students get help from the teacher (raise hands, put name on the board, ask other group members first).
- How students get supplies they are missing.
- How and when students sharpen pencils.
- What the acceptable noise levels are for discussions, group work and individual seat assignments.
- How students should work with other students or move into cooperative groups (moving desks, changing seats, noise level, handling of materials).
- How students are recognized to speak in class (raised hand, teacher calls on students, talk out).
- What behaviors you want students to demonstrate during presentations by other students.
- How students get materials or use special equipment.
- Arrangements for students to stay after school to finish tests or assignments.
- The procedures to follow with students during fire or disaster drills.

## Handling assignments/paperwork

You need to think about how you will manage the flow of paper — papers you distribute and papers you will collect from your students. Consider these points as you plan:

- How students will turn in assignments (put in a specific tray or box, pass to the front)
- (continued on back)**

# The learner-centered classroom

## Handling assignments/paperwork (continued)

of the room, one student or team leader collects).

- ❑ How students will turn in makeup work if they were absent (special tray, give to the teacher, put in a special folder, give to the teacher aide).
- ❑ How you or students will distribute hand outs (first person in each row, students pick up as they enter the room, a group member gets a copy for all members).
- ❑ How unfinished assignments can be completed (during lunch or recess, turn in by the end of the day).
- ❑ How late work will be graded (no penalty, minus points, lowered letter grade, zero, drop so many homework grades during a marking period).
- ❑ How and when students will make up quizzes and tests (same day they return to school, within 24 hours, within the week, before school, during lunch or recess, after school).

- ❑ How late projects will be graded (no penalty, minus points, lowered letter grade, no late work accepted).
- ❑ How students are made aware of short- and long-term requirements.
- ❑ How students are made aware of how they will be evaluated and given the grading scale or rubric ahead of time.
- ❑ How you establish due dates for major assignments, allowing several weeks in advance.



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