

School "Rules"! Ten Activities for Establishing Classroom Rules

Starting the school year on the right foot includes establishing classroom rules that will last the whole year through. Many teachers involve students in establishing their classroom rules. (Surprisingly, student-created rules are often much the same as -- or even tougher than -- rules a teacher might create. After all, students want to attend school in a safe environment, and they want to know the boundaries when it comes to classroom behavior.)

Included: Ten activities for involving students in creating classroom rules.

Starting the school year on the right foot includes establishing classroom rules that will last the whole year through. Most experienced educators say the key to creating classroom rules is to keep those rules few and simple -- and to establish up front the consequences if the rules are broken.

So what will those rules be? Many teachers involve students in creating their classroom rules. (That's what this article's ten activities are all about!) Surprisingly, many teachers report, whether you involve the students or not, you will likely end up with very similar rules. After all, students really want -- and thrive in -- a classroom environment in which they know the limits and feel safe, and that's what setting rules is all about.

If you are really stuck for the kinds of rules that might be appropriate for students at your grade level, see some suggestions on the Classroom Rules (<http://www.gigglepotz.com/expectations.htm>) and Classroom Rules -- Elementary Level (<http://worksheets.teach-nology.com/misc/back/rules/elem/>) Web pages.

The consequences for breaking a classroom rule are at least as important as the rule itself. Every teacher must create consequences with which they are comfortable (or follow set school procedures).

One teacher's list of consequences for breaking classroom rules follows:

First time: Name on board. Warning.

Second time: Student fills out a form that asks them to identify the rule they've broken and what they plan to do to correct the situation. (Teacher keeps the form on file.)

Third time: Isolation from class/team.

Fourth time: Call home to parents.

Fifth time: Office referral.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR CONTRACT

During the first days of school, teacher Mary Gambrel involves her students in creating their classroom rules. The rule-making process begins when Gambrel poses four questions to her students at Travis Middle School in Amarillo, Texas:

- How do you want me to treat you?

- How do you want to treat on another?
- How do you think I want to be treated?
- How should we treat one another when there's a conflict?

Students' share their thoughts about those questions in small groups, and then with the entire class. Responses are posted on a large sheet of chart paper. As an idea is repeated, a checkmark or star is placed beside it.

"With each suggestion, I usually ask the student to tell me what the rule 'looks like,'" Gambrel added. "If they say 'be nice,' they have to tell what *that* means. ... It's a great way to see what they're thinking."

The rule-making activity takes place over parts of several days. Each day the rules are refined. Gambrel then types up the rules so students can discuss them. "The students decide if there are items that need to be added or deleted," Gambrel explained. "Could some of the items be combined? Do any need rephrasing?" Students also take home their lists, review them, and think about additional ways in which the rules might be fine-tuned.

"After we're finished, I have all my students sign the 'poster' as a commitment to follow the class rules," said Gambrel. "Then I take it to the local copy center and have it reduced to notebook size. I make enough copies for everyone. Students keep their copies in their notebooks."

The original poster is displayed in the classroom. "When I feel they are slipping, I remind them of the 'contract' we all signed -- the rules they came up with and agreed to," Gambrel told Education World. "We review the rules before and after a long weekend or extended break and when someone new joins the class. During each review, I ask if any items need to be removed or added."

Many of the rules relate to respect, which is a key word in Gambrel's classroom. Respect plays out in many ways, including paying attention, turning in assignments, and being prepared.

Gambrel says she has done this activity for a couple of years and she has few discipline problems in her classroom. "I think this activity works because we end up with the same rules I want, but *they* are the ones who made the rules," she said. "This works much better than me posting my rules without input from them."

One other rule Gambrel shares with her students -- this rule comes from the Capturing Kids' Heart program too -- is what she calls the 100 Percent Rule. "I tell them everyone is not always able to give 100 percent every day. Sometimes they might come to class with a cold and all they can give is 80 percent. When they are in my class, I explain, 'If all you have to give is 80 percent, I want 100 percent of what you've got.' If any problems arise, all I usually have to do is ask a student who is having a hard day 'Are you giving me 100 percent?' and their behavior quickly changes."

RULES OF CIVILITY

One of the important events in George Washington's life is said to be that as a 16-year-old student he copied into his notebook all 110 Rules of Civility (<http://wwwFOUNDATIONSmag.com/civility.html>).

Those rules were commonly known and circulated during Washington's time. You might share the rules with your students. Invite them to translate the old-style wording into modern-day language and discuss the meaning of each rule.

After talking about some of the rules of civility, talk about rules, why they are needed, and what purposes they serve. Is there a need for 110 rules, or will a handful suffice? Invite students to share their ideas about what rules the class should have. Once the rules are decided, have students copy those rules (as George Washington did) onto the first page or inside cover of their notebooks. There, they will serve as a constant reminder of the class rules.

MORE ACTIVITIES FOR ESTABLISHING CLASSROOM RULES

Characteristics of good students. Arrange students into small groups. Have each group come up with a list of characteristics of a good student. Give the groups 10 to 15 minutes to create their lists. Then bring together the groups to share and create a master list of the qualities of good students. Use those as the material for creating your class rules.

Rhymes for remembering rules. Poems are a great tool for helping youngsters remember rules. Try some of these poems out on your K-2 students:

- School/Class Pledges (<http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/songspoems41.html>)
- Welcome Back to School Poems (<http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/songspoems5.html>)

Establish the need for rules. Arrange students into groups of four. Give each group 15 blank index cards and a pair of dice. Give the teams 15 to 20 minutes to create and play a game that makes use of the dice and the cards. When time is up, have a member of each team explain the game the group invented. The students will share the "rules" of the game. Discuss why rules are necessary. Then segue into creating your list of most necessary class rules.

Solve the equation. Write on the chalkboard $r - r = r$ and $r + r = r$ and then ask students what they think the equations mean. Tell students they have something to do with the rules of the classroom. Arrange students into small groups, and ask each group to think of a list of words that begin with the letter *r* that might relate to classroom rules. Then students use their list of words to come up with expressions that might fit the formula. For example: *respect + rewards = rules* or *rules - respect = rebellion*. Other possible *r* words might include the following: *regulation, relationships, reflect, routine, resolution, regard, read, react, ratify, reason(ing), reckless, and recommend*.

Under-the-desk Q&A. I found this fun activity on the MiddleWeb listserv (<http://www.middleweb.com/mw/aaChat.html>) ; it was posted by Andrea, a fifth-grade teacher in

Florida. She uses this activity to share classroom procedures. Before the students arrive, she tapes an index card under each student's desk. A numbered question is written on each card. When it's time to talk about class rules and procedures, the teacher asks students to check under their desks. The students find the index cards, and the teacher calls on the student who found the question with the number 1 on it. The student reads aloud the question. For example: "Mrs. S, when can I sharpen my pencil?" The teacher excitedly replies, "Oh, John, what a wise question!" or "Oh, Tricia, I'm so glad you thought to ask that question!" Then the teacher shares the procedure, rule, or information prompted by the question. Continue around the room until all the questions have been asked and answered.

Attitude is everything. Write the word *attitude* on the board or a chart in this way:

A = _____
T = _____
T = _____
I = _____
T = _____
U = _____
D = _____
E = _____

Have students write the same thing on a small sheet of paper. Then instruct students to write on the line the number that corresponds to each letter's position in the alphabet (for example A = 1, B = 2, C = 3 ...). Finally have students add up the numbers on the lines. What is the answer? The answer is 100, proving that attitude is 100 percent -- attitude is everything! Use this activity to lead into a discussion about the importance of attitude. Why is having a good attitude important? How do you recognize a "good attitude" in a person? Create a poster that has the ATTITUDE addition problem on it in large letters and numbers; the poster will serve as a constant reminder of the importance of a good attitude in your classroom.

The perfect classroom. Ask students to write a paragraph that tells what they think the perfect classroom should be like. (This is not fiction/fantasy writing; they should describe the atmosphere of an ideal *real* classroom.) Arrange students into groups of four. Ask each student to underline in his or her paragraph the "most important words or phrases." After students have done that, they should pass their papers to the person in their group who is seated to their right. Students should continue passing papers and underlining important words until the original writer has her/his paper back. At that point, students will share with the group some of the important words and phrases in their own writing; a group note taker will record the words and phrases that might best describe a perfect classroom. Group members will review the list and decide on five words or phrases to share with the class. When the class has a fully developed class list of words and phrases, they will use some of those words and phrases to write a "class statement" that will be posted on the wall for all to see. When things are not going "perfectly," it is time to review the class statement.

Reinforcing rules each day. Click on http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/TM/lp274.shtml for a worksheet to use with this activity. The printable page provides spaces for writing five classroom rules.

Stuck for the kinds of rules that might be appropriate for students at your grade level?

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The grid sheet allows you to put a happy face, a frown face, or a face that shows no emotion next to each rule each day. That way, students get positive (or negative) reinforcement about their abilities to follow the class rules. This sheet can also be used throughout the year to help selected students work on specific behaviors (for example, "I will hand in my homework assignments on time" or "I will not talk while walking in line in the hall"). The completed sheet can be sent home at the end of the week for a parent's signature.

ADDITIONAL LESSONS/ACTIVITIES

[Making Classroom Rules](#)

A lesson plan from AskEric. (Grades 5-8)

[Displaying Classroom Rules](#)

A unique puzzle-themed idea for a "classroom rules" bulletin board. (Grades K-6)

[We The People](#)

Create classroom rules using this lesson plan from AskEric. (Grades 5-8)

[Your Own Classroom Court](#)

A lesson for engaging students in setting classroom rules, making decisions, and settling differences. (Grades 5-12)

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