

Younger learners

Routines for younger learners

Lynn Wilson

It can be incredibly daunting for primary learners to come to a class where the teacher speaks most of the time in an unfamiliar language, English. Initially they may be curious, but they can soon become lost and bewildered and transfer their interest to their pencil case, their classmates, their coloured pencils, the space under the table, and so on, if they are not given some simple strategies to help become involved in the lesson.

For this reason, establishing some simple routines early on is extremely important. Simple routines help the learner to understand what is expected of them, why and when. This in turn helps to create a safe learning environment, in which learners can gradually become more autonomous. Routines help establish patterns of accepted behaviour, helping to prevent potential problems in classroom management. Routines provide simple opportunities to build learners' confidence in using English, and helping it to become more natural.

Once children are comfortable with your routines, they usually find their own ways to improve them or make them more challenging. For example, each lesson, one of my 8 year old learners takes the register. I used to change the register taker each lesson at random, but the learners got very upset if someone missed or jumped a turn, so it is now done in strict rotation!

Initially, learners had to ask each classmate two questions, always starting with *how are you?* and followed by something from the previous lesson, so at the start of the year they asked questions such as:

How old are you?

Have you got a pet?

What's your favourite colour/ animal/ game/ cartoon?

The first few lessons, I reviewed questions and appropriate responses and wrote them on the board for the register taker to refer to, but over the course of the year, this became unnecessary because learners knew they would need to know them and how to respond for the next lesson.

Every few lessons, I was also able to build the range of

questions they could ask. They got bored with *how are you?* so we looked at alternatives:

How are you doing?

How's it going?

How's life?

The learners also adapted the routine, first so that the register taker could nominate someone to ask them questions, and second, as we built up a range of phrases and questions in certain lexical areas, the register taker started to build a mini dialogue asking follow up questions. For example *have you got a pet?* became:

have you got a pet?

yes, I've got a dog

What colour is it?

black and white

how old is it?

2 years old

what's its name?

Tarzan.

I set up the routine, but as they have gained confidence in the classroom, they have developed it and it has now become theirs. The side benefits of this are they pay attention when we learn new phrases because they know they will need them, they use English automatically during this activity, and as confidence has increased, this has overflowed into other activities, and last but not least, they listen to each other.

Below are a few other ideas for simple routines and classroom management techniques adapted from a collection put together by Julie Tice, the former editor of *In English* and Jo Smith, a Senior Teacher at the British Council in Parede. Try a couple out!

Lining up

It is important to establish this right from the beginning.

When to and how to encourage the children to do it well:

- **Always** - when the children are entering or leaving the classroom, make them line up.
- When the children begin class, even if some of them have put bags etc in the room, ask them to leave the classroom and line up outside.
- While outside, encourage a straight line by going down the line with a hand, or putting your hand on top of the first student's head.

Younger learners

- Alternatively, make it more of a game. Imagine that they are **smart soldiers**, marching in a line.

Passwords for entering and leaving the classroom (or Q&A to review language/lexis)

- Using passwords to enter and exit the room is good to help build up vocabulary. It also keeps the children calm as they enter the room. At the end of the lesson they do the password for next time.

Coats and bags

- When the students are in the classroom, get them to take off their coats. Get them to have the same coat hanger/share one with a friend.
- Put the bags in a corner which is not near the door or blocking the work space in any way.

Getting things out of bags

- Ask children to get out their files and pencil cases at the start of the lesson. Try to discourage them from going back into their bag, unless it is urgent.
- Return everything into their bags **only** at the end of the lesson.

Mobile phones

- At the start of each lesson, ask students to turn off their phones. Check they have done so.

Going to the toilet

Children constantly asking for the toilet can cause chaos in the classroom.

One routine can be to get the children to say **toilet please** during class time.

However, try to establish fixed times for them to go to the toilet, as sometimes after the break, they will immediately ask for the toilet. It is therefore important for students to know why they have a break:

- Going to the toilet
- Eating
- Drinking
- Playing

Chewing gum

Ask students if they have gum to put it in the bin at the beginning of the lesson, similarly after a break.

Taking the register

- At the start of the year, say names out loud.
- Get them to reply I'm here. Takes a bit of time to train them but they soon get used to it.
- You can gradually build on this by giving the learners responsibility for taking the register as described earlier.

Classroom language and routines

Getting learners to use English for classroom language can be a great way to make speaking English feel more natural as they will use it frequently.

- Getting the children used to doing simple classroom actions, from the beginning, will help speed up things.
- Stand up, sit down, chairs under, make a circle, sit on the carpet, make a line, tidy your things away etc. are very useful to practise with the children as a game/competition.
- If you get learners writing at the board, make sure they put the top back on the pen!

Sitting in seats

- Always begin explaining activities with students sitting **on** their seats.
- Request that during question and answer sessions that the students still **sit** on their seats and **put up** their hands.

Hands up to answer questions

- Do not accept any answers from students that shout out.
- Ask students to put hands up and hands down. Again try to make it a game to establish a routine.

Moving around the classroom

- For some activities you will want students sitting in a circle, perhaps on the floor. For others they will be sitting around tables. You need to organise the move.
- Get them to carry out the move in steps. Stand up. Come over here. Now sit down.
- Some students are slower than others to move, so do a countdown from 5, to get everyone to arrive at the same time. Students will eventually join in with the counting.
- If you have a big group, you can get them to move in groups, e.g. give each table a name such as red table, blue table and get them to move.

Chairs under tables

- Ask students to do this like a game with classroom routines.

- Again be strict about this because it links with tidying up the classroom at the end of the lesson.

Quiet times/noisy times

- Establishing when the students are quiet and when they can be noisy is important. You could design visual signs to go on the board to indicate if it's a quiet activity or time to talk.
- A good idea is put on English songs/music for background noise. Children do tend to sing-a-long.

Class monitors

- A great idea to save lots of time is to have 1 child pencil, monitor, pencil sharpener/rubber monitor etc. They can quickly give out and collect at the end of lessons.
- This obviously saves time and stress when it comes to the big **tidy up** at the end of the lesson.
- **Remeber** to rotate them!

Chefe de Sala

- Having 1 child in charge of the classroom is also useful for classroom management, as they will be much stricter than you about how tidy the room is. Again, rotate.

Good work stamps/ smiley faces

- If you can buy yourself a selection of rubber stamps, the students will enjoy getting them for good work.
- You need to be selective about what you give credit for.
- The students will want you to put lots of stamps, but be limited.

Lots of positive language to praise them....excellent..

- You can **never** give enough praise.
- This is the **key** to good discipline.
- Begin as soon as the students are lining up...
- It will seem unnatural at first if you're not used to it.

Tidying up time: 10-15 minutes

- Children take an unbelievable time to get packed up and ready to go. Leave **at least** 10 minutes at the end of class to tidy, put things in bags, coats on etc.



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- Sometimes I get students to tidy 20 minutes before and then do songs and games on the carpet/board. This saves you getting stressed at the end of the lesson and shouting at students to tidy. At which point you may end up tidying the room yourself! (not recommended...learner responsibility etc...)

Good behaviour stamps and smiley faces

- Use action/mime to determine what is good/bad behaviour and use smiley and sad faces on board or on cards to refer to during lesson.
- At the end of each lesson, ask learners to evaluate themselves as good, so-so or not good and make a record in your register, or on a poster in the classroom. This is very good to raise their awareness of how their behaviour contributes to, or disrupts the class, and also enables them to take responsibility for their action. They also have numerous opportunities to improve in the following lessons.

Certificates - web sites

- You can make your own customised certificates from the web.
- Give them on a monthly or termly basis.
- Ideas- tidy writing, best drawing, cooperation, etc

Lynn Wilson is a Senior Teacher at the British Council, Lisbon.