



Have your students ever entered the classroom and asked,

“What are we going to do today?” *Or, worse yet, “Are we going to do anything today?” Has a returning student who was absent said, “What did we do yesterday?” Save your teaching voice and establish the following routines to eliminate these questions.*

1 The “today we will” list. Create a list on a whiteboard or flipchart of the day’s schedule. List times and activities. For younger students, you might have a morning list and then uncover the afternoon list. Using this list with middle and high school students helps them see what needs to be covered, even if your class is only 50 minutes long. Keeping the list posted also helps you to stick with your lesson plan while still teaching from around the room, as the list is always visible.

2 The focus activity/question. When students enter your classroom, they should know that learning will take place. They need to know that there is work to be done immediately. Posting a warm-up or an essential question, or a review

problem, helps get students settled and thinking about your subject. Some teachers call these sponges, as they soak up time while attendance is taken and other administrative duties performed.

3 The entrance table. If you have several sections of students who come and go from your room, an entrance table is a necessity. Place everything on the table that students will need for that class—workbooks, handouts, etc., and have students learn that they enter your room, check the entrance table, then get seated to work on the focus activity. Some teachers even put paper tissues and a can of old pencils on their entrance table.

4 The graded papers box. Most elementary teachers have “cubbies” or mailboxes for each student’s papers. When students move from class to class to class, another system must be employed. Try a large plastic file box, with a file folder for each student. Put section dividers for each class, and teach students that when the box is on the entrance table, their papers are graded. They can pick up their papers from their folder, leaving the folder in the box. No time is spent passing out papers! The added bonus for you is that you can grade papers that are already alphabetized, as students put their finished work in their own folders, and folders stay in order. If a student is absent, handouts are placed in his/her folder, and he/she picks them up from the entrance table at the start of the class.

5 The assignment notebook. Since space is limited in most classrooms, consider an assignment notebook placed in one location for students to refer to when they return from an absence. In each class session, or each morning or afternoon for elementary classes, one student is responsible to write assignments in the notebook and also to put handouts in the absent students’ folders. Yes, you will have to check the pages, as some students might write “we did nothing,” but most students will be willing to help and just writing the assignments and a few notes will help some students stay focused.

6 Individualized attention. When students know the routine of entering the room, checking the table, picking up their own papers from folders, and then being seated to read the “today we will” and the focus, there is an order to the process. The best benefit is that if students can do all of this for themselves, the teacher has time to say hello, answer content questions, and give a little individualized attention to students, which is truly what students need.

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