

# MOST COMMON CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT & LESSON PLANNING

# MISTAKES WE MAKE

NO ESL TEACHER  
IS PERFECT

NO MATTER IF  
YOU'VE BEEN  
TEACHING FOR  
20 MINUTES  
OR 20 YEARS

NOW YOU CAN LEARN  
**VALUABLE  
LESSONS**  
FROM EACH  
AND EVERY ONE  
OF THESE  
MISTAKES



ANYONE  
CAN MAKE  
MISTAKES

MOST OF WHICH  
ARE RESULTS OF OUR  
TRYING TOO HARD  
OR BEING TOO IMPATIENT

IT'S THE  
LITTLE  
CHANGES  
THAT WILL MAKE A  
WORLD OF  
DIFFERENCE  
IN YOUR  
TEACHING



MISTAKES YOU SHOULD AVOID IF YOU WANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY AS AN ESL TEACHER

# CONTENTS

- 3 **MUST READ:** 8 Worst Lesson Planning Mistakes You Can Make
- 4 **MUST READ:** ESL Teachers Beware: Are You Making These Mistakes in Class?
- 5 **MUST READ:** Get Your Act Together: 7 Mistakes That Make You Look Unprofessional
- 6 **MUST READ:** ESL Alert! Do You Make These Mistakes When Teaching English?
- 7 **MUST READ:** Don't Do It: 10 Things Never to Do in the Classroom
- 8 **LESSON PLANNING:** 6 Super Easy Steps to Creating a Winning Lesson Plan
- 9 **ERROR CORRECTION:** The Upside of Errors: When and Why to Avoid Correcting Your Students
- 10 **BEGINNER TEACHERS:** 5 Worst Mistakes All Beginner ESL Teachers Make (And You Too?)
- 11 **ONLINE TEACHERS:** 5 Mistakes All Online Teachers Make - And How To Avoid Them
- 12-13 **STRESS:** ESL Teacher's Meltdown: Problems & Solutions
- 14 **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS:** 7 Most Common ESL Problems and How to Solve Them
- 15 **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS:** When Things Go Wrong: How to Turn a Disaster ESL Lesson into a Triumph
- 16 **MUST READ:** Becoming A Super ESL High School Teacher: 8 Little-Known Secrets
- 17 **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:** How to Address Classroom Behavior Issues: 7 Ideas to Keep Your Kids Organized and Productive
- 18-19 **BEHAVIOR:** Demands, Accusations, & Blaming: Dealing with Outrageous Student Behavior without Losing Your Sanity
- 20 **DISCIPLINE:** Top 10 Tips to Deal With Indiscipline in the Classroom
- 21 **PROBLEM STUDENTS:** Keep Your Cool: Tips for Handling Difficult Students
- 22 **PROBLEM STUDENTS:** 4 Types of Problem Students and Strategies to Manage Them
- 23 **BEHAVIOR:** ESL SOS! 7 Most Common Behavior Problems and How to Deal with Them
- 24-25 **BEHAVIOR:** Entitled Behavior in Students, Its Source, and Addressing It
- 26-27 **PROBLEM STUDENTS:** So What are We Doing Today, Teach? Dealing with the Demanding or Cynical Student
- 28 **PROBLEM STUDENTS:** But It is Clear: Dealing with the Defensive Student
- 29-30 **PROBLEM STUDENTS:** So Sorry to Keep Bothering You: Dealing with the Very Insecure Student
- 31 **EAGER BEAVER:** How to Deal with Eager Beavers: 5 Instant Solutions to Common Problems
- 32 **BONUS:** 5 Effective Ways to Calm Your Students Down

# 8 Worst Lesson Planning Mistakes You Can Make

**TO AN ESL TEACHER, THE LESSON PLAN IS AS ESSENTIAL AS THE COURSE MATERIALS, MAYBE EVEN MORE SO.**

Think of the coursebook as the vehicle, the tool you will use to take your class on this journey that is learning to speak another language. The lesson plan is the road map that helps you set a course from Point A to Point B, the first being little or no knowledge of a specific language point, the second being learning said language point - reaching a learning goal.

But like any road trip, things can go wrong. And if you embark on a road trip with the wrong map... well, you're just setting yourself up for trouble. Here are some of the mistakes in lesson planning that will make you veer off course.

## 8 BIGGEST LESSON PLANNING MISTAKES

### 1 PLANNING BEFORE GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CLASS

Would you plan a road trip with a group of friends without knowing what they want to see or what their interests are? Chances are they have their own goals/expectations for the trip. You will surely have the course syllabus for the semester/year ahead of time, but that is simply a list of what your students should learn to reach a specific level. Lesson planning (what you'll do for each individual lesson) should begin after you've obtained more information about your students' goals, expectations and interests.

### 2 NOT HAVING A CLEAR GOAL

Consider a single lesson you will teach. What do you want your students to accomplish by the end of the lesson? Learn the Simple Past? Or better yet, learn to talk about events that happened in the past? Once you have a clear goal in mind, everything else will fall into place, including the activities you will choose to reach this goal.

### 3 HAVING NO LESSON STRUCTURE

Your course syllabus is your big picture of the entire journey: each individual lesson plan is what you'll be doing at each individual stop and what you'll be doing to get them one step closer to the main goal. It's simply not good enough to spend 45 minutes at each stop: you have to have a plan - with a solid structure. For a great example of what this structure should look like check out this article.

### 4 FAILING TO INCLUDE VARIETY

When you go on a road trip you want to see natural landscape, but also enjoy some of the things each city or town has to offer. Variety is key. Make sure to include lots of different types of activities in your lesson plan: video, music, crafts, games, group work or pair work, etc... but make sure you include activities or tasks that serve your purpose: reaching the goal.

### 5 USING THE SAME LESSON PLANS

The coursebook and the class syllabus may be the same as last year's, but are your students the same? Each class, each group of students is different. The lesson plans you used in previous years may not be the best for this particular group of learners. Moreover, consider the new things you might need to change/add - there are always new apps, music artists, movies and interests that crop up every year. If you're happy with your previous lesson plans or have some that really worked, by all means use them, but don't forget to make the necessary tweaks so that they better suit a particular group of students.

### 6 PLANNING TECHNOLOGY FOR TECHNOLOGY'S SAKE

Everyone is using technology in the classroom, so you'd better add some computer/Internet activities, right? Wrong! Yes, there are amazing things

you can do with your ESL class, but technology should be used in the classroom only if it helps you reach your learning goal. For example, say your goal is for students to practice asking for and giving directions, and you want to use a particular piece of realia, like a map, but you don't have any real ones. You can always use online maps (virtual realia) and for that you could definitely use a computer.

### 7 COVER MATERIALS AND NOT TEACH STUDENTS

If your goal is to "Finish Chapter 7", well, let me be honest with you: that's not a very good goal. Yes, you have a syllabus. Yes, you have an overall class plan you need to meet. But top of mind should be what your students must learn.

### 8 NO PLAN B

You've planned an awesome lesson, a multimedia lesson with video and audio so your class can have some good listening comprehension exercises. But the moment you connect your computer you realize you have no Internet connection. Well, stuff happens and when it comes to using technology in the classroom, you have to be prepared in case something does not go according to plan. Should you ditch your entire plan and just have them play games for the rest of the class? You should always have a Plan B, another route that will take you to the same lesson goal. If your goal is to practice listening comprehension, you should have another listening comprehension exercise that will easily replace the one you planned on doing in the computer, maybe a CD or a reading out loud.

**PLANNING IS IMPORTANT, ABOVE ALL, BECAUSE IT GIVES STUDENTS A SENSE OF STRUCTURE.**

They get the impression that on this road trip, you're in the driver's seat, and you know where you're taking them. They will know that you're taking them where they need to go. You can simply drive them there. Or you can give them one heck of a ride. Which would you choose?



# ESL Teachers Beware: Are You Making These Mistakes in Class?

**NO ESL TEACHER IS PERFECT, NO MATTER IF YOU'VE BEEN TEACHING FOR 20 MINUTES OR 20 YEARS (PRESENT COMPANY INCLUDED!) ANYONE CAN MAKE MISTAKES, MOST OF WHICH ARE RESULTS OF OUR TRYING TOO HARD OR BEING TOO IMPATIENT.**

I've already covered some of these mistakes in another article, where I mention one of our classic blunders: too much TTT (Teacher Talking Time). Of course, we don't want to talk more than the students. But we find ourselves explaining and over explaining, or simply getting too chatty in our efforts to bond with students. Here are some more of the worst mistakes you can make in your ESL class:

## **ARE YOU MAKING THESE MISTAKES IN CLASS?**

### **1 YOU INDULGE IN USELESS BLABBER**

This is what I also call the "saying out loud things that you should just keep to yourself" syndrome. It goes something like this: you say to your class, "OK, so we're going to play this game, but we're going to use the board instead of these cute little photocopies I had planned to give you, but I can't give you as the copier is broken. Sorry about that, but these things happen, and well, we need to adapt and adjust to what we have... OK... Oh, I'll need another marker because this one is not working properly..." And it goes on and on and on...

Needless to say, students don't need to hear all of this. Quite frankly, in some levels it can be quite confusing – they may not even understand half of it. Repeat after me: Silence is good. It's OK for students to have some quiet time while you set up a game or activity. Moreover, keep any problems you may have had with the school's equipment to yourself. It's more professional, too.

### **2 YOU COMPLETE THEIR SENTENCES FOR THEM**

Your student says, "Playing soccer is..."

And you jump in and say, "fun?" Talk about eager beavers! Sometimes the teacher is the eager beaver in class and doesn't give students enough time to come up with the right word or answer. Students need time. If you jump the gun and complete the answer for them, you're taking away their opportunity to prove to you just how much they've learned. Also, consider that it could actually annoy the student. What if, in the situation above, the word the student was actually looking for is "boring"?

Completing students' sentences is like cutting someone else's food. You do it when they're little, but at some point they have to start doing it for themselves.

### **3 YOU ASK THEM IF THEY UNDERSTAND**

Imagine I am looking straight into your eyes, and I ask you "Do you understand?" Most students will feel compelled to squeak out a tentative "yes..." Who would actually face the teacher and say "no"? Who wants the rest of class to think that they are not the brightest bulb in the box? Don't put your students in this position.

There are ways to check for comprehension without having to put students on the spot. Try asking them questions, instead, to make sure they've understood.

### **4 YOU ECHO THEIR ANSWERS**

A student says, "I work at Google." You say, "You work at Google. Great! You work at Google." First of all, there is absolutely no learning value in parroting your students. Second, if you do it immediately after they speak, you may be interrupting their train of thought and may even cut them off from whatever else they were going to say. What if your student was about to tell you what he did at Google?

After a student speaks, give him or her time to add something else. If you feel compelled to say something, simply reply with a "How interesting!" And pause

to give them time to add a new piece of information.

### **5 YOU DON'T CHECK TO SEE IF THEY'VE UNDERSTOOD YOUR INSTRUCTIONS**

So, you rattle off a set of instructions in rapid-fire succession and say, "OK, let's get started!" This is usually when students start whispering to each other things like, "What did she say?" or "What do we do now?"

Always check to see if they've gotten your instructions straight. Ask the class, "OK class so what do we do first? And then? Good! You may begin." If it's an exercise they must complete, it's a great idea to do the first question with them as an example.

### **6 YOU GIVE THEM UNCLEAR INSTRUCTIONS**

This mistake goes hand in hand with the previous. Try to use words you know they will understand. Give them steps that are easy to follow, and if you can number them, so much the better. This is particularly true for special projects like crafts, where students are expected to follow a series of steps. If they are not familiar with any of the vocabulary make sure you explain it to them first: this includes words like "stapler", "paper clips" or any other materials they may not be familiar with.

**AS MENTIONED EARLIER, ANYONE CAN MAKE MISTAKES. I AM ONE OF THOSE TEACHERS WHO COMPLETE STUDENTS' SENTENCES. GUILTY AS CHARGED!**

After 20 years, I still need to stop myself every now and then, but this is something I tend to do when I'm running out of time for an activity.

# Get Your Act Together: 7 Mistakes That Make You Look Unprofessional

**THERE ARE TEACHERS WHO ARE NEW TO THIS ESL TEACHING GIG, BUT THERE ARE THOSE WHO'VE BEEN DOING IT FOR YEARS.**

But no matter if you're a novice or an old-timer, nobody wants to look unprofessional. You might think only inexperienced teachers risk looking incompetent – after all they lack experience, but those who have been teaching for years may make the occasional blunder, too. So, when it comes to looking and acting like a pro, we're all on the same boat. Here are the 7 mistakes you'll want to avoid, if you want to be taken seriously as an ESL teacher.

**AVOID 7 MISTAKES THAT MAKE YOU LOOK UNPROFESSIONAL**

## 1 NOT BEING PREPARED

This one's fairly obvious and a mistake most teachers try to avoid making. But there are different levels of preparedness. You have a solid lesson plan and the right materials – but are you prepared for the unexpected? What will you do if your Internet connection fails, your laptop starts acting up or the website you wanted to see is temporarily unavailable? And that's just in terms of technology, where lots of things can go wrong. But suppose technology is not an issue. Have you really checked the materials you'll be using? Is there anything you're not sure about, perhaps a very technical term in the reading or a grammar point you're not confident teaching? Being prepared involves expecting the unexpected (in terms of things that could go wrong) but also anticipating students' needs and doubts.

## 2 BEING DISORGANIZED

Preparedness and organization go hand in hand, and there's no better way to lose credibility than being in a constant state of disorganization. Do you know where all of your materials are? How do you keep track of assignments or grades? When you want to use a piece of realia, tool or toy, can you get it within a few seconds, or do you need to search through several boxes, closets and drawers? The problem with being disorganized is that it

not only makes you look unprofessional, it also wastes precious minutes of your students' time.

## 3 TAKING THINGS PERSONALLY

A student drops out of the course, and you feel devastated. Or they're not motivated, and they don't participate in class. Every now and then a student may even confess they "hate learning English". Do not automatically assume it's your fault. Although there's a lot you can do to help students overcome certain barriers to learning, there are things that are simply beyond your control. And their love/hate of the English language is one of them. A real pro offers to help, sets realistic goals for the student and tries to motivate them. But a real pro can't get emotional over the fact that a student hates English or does not want to continue learning. If you feel confident you've given your best, then just let it go.

## 4 NOT DELIVERING WHAT YOU PROMISED

This one's a biggie, folks. If you start the school year by promising results, you'd better deliver them (and if you promise realistic results that should not be a problem). If you say you'll start each class by establishing a learning goal, then that's what you should do. If you say to a group of young learners they'll get stickers for completing an activity, then you'd better whip them out at the end of class. If you're in doubt about what you'll deliver, don't make any promises. But being inconsistent, i.e. saying you'll do one thing and then doing something else, or worse yet, completely forgetting, is very unprofessional.

## 5 CONFESSING YOU'RE A NEWBIE

We've all been there. We've all had a first day on the job. We've all been newbie teachers. But even if you're a newbie, there's no need to give your class full disclosure. If they ask, don't lie to them. But don't start a class by saying, "I'm new. In fact, this is the very first lesson I'll be teaching. Please bear with me if I make

some mistakes." In the words of the famous sports brand, just do it. Start teaching and do the best you can. Chances are your students won't notice minor mistakes if you seem to be confident and act like you know what you're doing.

## 6 UNDERESTIMATING YOUR STUDENTS

Quite often we come across students who have more initiative than most. And on the other hand, teachers who underestimate them. Messages like, "This is too hard for you", will not only squash their natural curiosity and motivation, it will make you look bad because you're supposed to encourage them and support them in their efforts. It does not mean that you can't give them realistic expectations. Students we most often underestimate are children. You'd be surprised at what they can understand and accomplish. So, resist the urge to make a game, exercise or test "easier" because "they're just kids". See if they're up to a challenge instead!

## 7 FORGETTING IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS

Needless to say, you should learn your students' names as fast as you can. But not only that. Getting their professions, nationalities, or personal details mixed up is not cool. You give the impression that you're simply not interested when you should be doing the opposite: you should take the time to get to know them and their interests.

**NOBODY'S PERFECT AND EVERYBODY MAKES MISTAKES.**

But some are costlier than others. Impressions count, and a great deal of your success as an ESL teacher depends on how professional you seem to be. You can have one year or ten years of experience – you should always act like a pro.

# ESL Alert! Do You Make These Mistakes When Teaching English?

**HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW SOME ESL STUDENTS PUT THEIR TEACHERS ON A PEDESTAL? THEY SEEM TO THINK WE CAN DO NO HARM.**

But we're far from perfect, and we make mistakes – though, thankfully most students don't realize we make them! And since the best way to become a better teacher is to learn from our mistakes, here's a handy little list to get you started on the road to improvement (because there's always room for improvement, right?)

## 7 MISTAKES TEACHERS MAKE WHEN TEACHING ENGLISH

### 1 LECTURING

You walk up to the board and say, "Class, today we're going to learn the Present Perfect. The Present Perfect is formed ...." And so the "lecture" continues for several minutes. ESL students have very practical needs: they need to learn to communicate in English. Standing at the board and lecturing is not practical at all. Students want to know how to use the language, and you'll want to get into that right away.

TIP: Lead into the new grammar you're teaching so students see the connection between something they already know and something that's completely new. Use their previous knowledge and experience. Establish a context. For an example of how to teach a verb tense like the Present Perfect, check out this article.

### 2 CALLING FOR VOLUNTEERS

You start the class by saying, "Who would like to tell us what they did over the summer?...Anyone?... Anyone?..." (cue the uncomfortable silence and awkward glances between students.) News flash! Most ESL students are self-conscious about their English fluency and will rarely volunteer to speak in front of the entire class. Yes, there are students who always raise their hands and volunteer to supply answers to everything. But you want everyone to have a chance to speak, not just the eager beavers.

TIP: Call on students, especially those

who are self-conscious and shy (how will they ever practice if you don't?) But, be very careful how you do it. You don't want to suddenly point a finger at them and put them on the spot. Try to make it sound like a natural part of the conversation: That's very interesting, Tomás. So what do you think, María? Do you agree with Tomás?

### 3 FAILING TO PROVIDE LEARNING GOALS

You start teaching something new, like Reported Speech, out of blue, with no explanation as to why this will be useful for students. Most often, students will respect you and your decisions. If you start class by teaching "Reported Speech", most will pay attention and try to learn it. They will assume you're teaching it for a good reason. But that's not good enough. They should understand exactly how this will be useful for them when communicating in English.

TIP: Ask your class to give you examples of situations in which they had to "report" to someone what someone else said, like telling a coworker what the boss said. Students will come up with examples, and then you can say, "Well, today you'll learn how to report what another person said." They will start learning the grammar, but with this goal in mind and a context they can relate to.

### 4 EITHER ALL GROUP OR ALL INDIVIDUAL WORK

You assign writing, worksheets or crafts and have students work individually. All the time. Or you divide them into groups. For most tasks. Students need to be able to do both: collaborate to produce an end result, like a cartoon, poster or story, and work individually to have the chance to really practice.

TIP: Try to have different types of activities within the same class period, including pair and group work, as well as quiet individual work. Some students work better by themselves, while others thrive while cooperating and interacting with others, but they must all have different types of experiences.

### 5 STANDING OR SITTING AT THE SAME SPOT

You stand at the board or sit at your desk for the duration of the class. If you really want to hold your students' attention and teach a lively, active class, you need to move around!

TIP: Leave the sitting for when your class is engaged in a quiet, individual task like writing. As you teach, move to the front and the back of the classroom. Don't be afraid to walk around. Make students feel that there is no part of the classroom where they can "hide".

### 6 FAILING TO COURSE CORRECT

You start an activity you had planned, but it's not going as planned. Students find it boring or too easy. Your gut tells you it won't be as effective as you thought. Do you stick to the plan, or go with your gut and drop it?

TIP: Always have a Plan B. The lesson plan is course you've mapped, but sometimes you have to course correct. Don't be afraid to drop an activity if it's not going well. Replace it with another one.

### 7 LACKING ENTHUSIASM

You start the lesson by saying, "Well class, today we're going to learn the Past Perfect, a grammar point I'm not particularly thrilled to teach because it's harder than most, but what the heck, we might as well get started." You probably won't actually say this, but your attitude, posture and tone might convey this.

TIP: It may be hard for you to pull it off, but you should try to do everything you do in class with the same level of enthusiasm. If you have to teach a particularly tricky verb tense or grammar point, make it fun! One good way to make boring topics more interesting is to connect them to things students are interested in.

**TO ERR IS HUMAN AND TO FORGIVE DIVINE – THE FIRST PERSON YOU SHOULD FORGIVE IS YOURSELF.**

Don't feel bad if you've made any of these mistakes. Or if you still make them every now and then. There's no better time than the present to make the little changes that will make a world of difference in your teaching.



# Don't Do It: 10 Things Never to Do in the Classroom

**TEACHERS ARE THE HEAD OF A CLASSROOM, AND WITH THAT RESPONSIBILITY COMES A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF AUTHORITY. REMEMBER THAT ALL TEACHERS HAVE BAD DAYS AND MAKE MISTAKES.**

This list of 10 things never to do in the classroom is to help you avoid those missteps and get you back on track if you slip.

## 10 THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO IN THE CLASSROOM

### 1 LOSE YOUR TEMPER

Losing your temper in any classroom can be disastrous. This especially applies in Asia where showing strong negative emotion is one of the worst things you can do. All teachers have bad days, get irritated with students, and struggle to maintain composure at one time or another. You really do not want to lose your temper so that you end up shouting, yelling, or crying. If you feel yourself getting angry it might be a good idea to step out of the room or remove yourself from the situation and count to one thousand.

### 2 LOSE CONTROL

One thing you will never gain back if you lose it is control. Don't let the students in any class walk all over you, take control of your lesson, or get unruly in any way. Sometimes student might become overly-excited or obnoxiously loud during an activity, and you need to be able to bring them back down. Students need to respect you, and if you are too passive and don't have boundaries you are bound to lose control at some point. One great strategy that works with both kids and adults is to create a signal that when they see it, they know they are expected to do the same thing, and get quiet. Some popular options are: raising your hand, clapping if it isn't too noisy already, or waving. It is a domino effect when you reach a few students, the rest will follow and you will regain control.

### 3 GO CRAZY WITH HANDOUTS

Too much paper is just not a good idea. Temper handouts with activities

that involve students and don't just keep them sitting idly by doing boring rote work and trying to weed through your ten-page grammar explanation. Use the board, interact with students and never rely on paper to do your job!

### 4 EAT LUNCH

You'd be surprised how many teachers bring their lunch into the classroom! This is just not appropriate with any level or any age. Drinking a morning cup of coffee or bringing in donuts or snacks for the group is one thing, but don't eat your afternoon meal while class is in session.

### 5 GET OVERLY INVOLVED

Depending on your circumstances, it can become pretty easy to become overly emotionally involved with your students. Because you are teaching a language, you may learn a lot about students during the class, and you may even need to extend some help to them outside of the classroom. Be careful to have boundaries for yourself and don't get too caught up in students' problems. Also be wary of creating personal relationships outside of the class. This can easily happen when teaching adults, just be sure it doesn't interfere with the classroom dynamic.

### 6 MAKE FUN OF STUDENTS

It may seem obvious that you shouldn't ever mock or make fun of students, but sometimes what seems to be a harmless joke or comment can wound a student's confidence and self-esteem. It is a great talent to be able to use humor in the classroom and also show students how to laugh at themselves. Just be careful that your jokes or sarcasm aren't aimed at particular students in a personally harmful way.

### 7 SIT DOWN

Sitting down through an entire class is just not appropriate. In Asia, for example, the teacher is expected to stand or walk around throughout the whole classroom period. Sitting down for too long delivers a message of laziness, unless you are injured or ill. When in the classroom it is a time to interact,

to circulate and to lead the students. You also don't want your students always sitting down and not moving around. Give them the opportunity to mingle around, stand at the board, or do group work away from their chairs.

### 8 BE LATE

Being late is a big problem in many countries and for many nationalities of students. It is very important to model the behavior you want from students. Being late very occasionally or sometimes coming in a few moments late is not a problem. It's when you are chronically late that you show the students it is acceptable for them to be late as well. Be as punctual as you possibly can, and when you are late be sure to apologize to students.

### 9 ONLY FOLLOW THE BOOK

Sometimes teachers fall into the trap of teaching everything directly from the textbook. This is not only boring and tedious - it is doing your students a disservice. Because they are learning a language, students need a lot of opportunities to practice and to experiment with their new skills. If you only focus on what the book dictates, the students will miss a lot.

A textbook is a guide and can provide ideas about the order of topics and the structure to follow. Be sure that you are connecting your activities to the book, but not solely doing everything from that one source.

### 10 PLAY FAVORITES

All students in the class need to get your attention and your direction. It is okay to have your favorite students as long as you don't give them concessions that you don't provide to anyone else. It is only natural to hit it off with certain students, just be sure that you are fair to all the students in your class and give everyone adequate consideration and praise.

**WE'VE PROBABLY ALL MET TEACHERS THAT HAVE DONE AT LEAST ONE OF THE ITEMS ON THIS LIST.** Look at your own style and be confident that you won't ever perform any of the ten things on this list.

# 6 Super Easy Steps to Creating a Winning Lesson Plan

**COMING UP WITH LESSON PLANS IS AN EVER PRESENT TASK FOR MOST TEACHERS, AND ESL TEACHERS ARE NO EXCEPTION.**

We have books, standards, and standardized tests to which we often teach. Sometimes, though, we can become so overwhelmed with the material that we fail to make a careful plan for sharing it with our students. However, that can be the exception rather than the rule if you follow these super simple steps for creating a winning lesson plan!

## **HOW TO CREATE A WINNING LESSON PLAN: 6 SUPER EASY STEPS**

### **1 KNOW YOUR PEOPLE**

Before you can make any kind of effective lesson plan, you have to know your students. What age are they? Why are they studying English? What is their current proficiency level? You may already know those answers, but ask yourself the less obvious questions, too. What learning styles do they lean toward? What topics interest them? What cultures are represented in your class? Also, keep in mind any students who may have additional or special needs during the lesson.

### **2 KNOW YOUR PLAN**

Officially, you should know your learning objectives. Put more simply, this means knowing what you hope to accomplish by the end of your lesson. Do you want your students to know a specific set of vocabulary or a new grammatical structure? Do you want your class to practice using the language they already know or be comfortable with a dialogue in a specific situation? These are the language specific objectives for your lesson. If you are teaching content, think about ways to tie it to reading, writing, listening and speaking for your English students. Always keep in mind your ultimate goal, and knowing where you

plan to get by the end of the lesson will help you as you work your way through it.

### **3 KNOW YOUR PRIORITIES**

What are the most important things your students should know from the lesson you are planning? What would you like them to know but can be cut if necessary? What extra bits of information would you like to present to the class but feel confident they are not essential to the lesson or for your students' understanding? Decide the answers to these questions before you go into detail with your lesson plan. For example, in a speaking class learning a specific set of vocabulary may be secondary. Learning cultural nuances may be a third level priority. When you define your priorities at the start of your lesson planning, you can be sure that your students will learn what they need to learn by the end of your class.

### **4 KNOW YOUR PIECES**

Just like any good story, a good lesson plan needs a beginning, middle and end. Plan a way of introducing the subject that will get your students thinking about what they already know, making connections in the brain. Plan more than one activity to introduce and practice new material. As you do, note any vocabulary or grammatical structures or other language specifics your student will need to successfully accomplish the tasks and make plans to review them as necessary. Also, think about whether you will need more than one class period to cover all the material in your lesson. Finish by planning a closing element to your lesson in which your students review and apply the information they learned during class.

### **5 ANTICIPATE YOUR PACE**

One of the hardest tasks for a new teacher is determining how much time a given activity will take. Often the activities we think will take the largest portion of a class period are

over in a matter of minutes and those we expect our students to breeze through end up trapping them like so much muck and mire. Make sure you are ready for anything in your class by over planning activities for each lesson. It is easy to scrap an optional activity at the last minute if you run out of time but not as easy to add an activity when you have not planned for it. Be ready for anything, and after you present your lesson make note of how long you spent on each activity.

### **6 PROCESS YOUR OUTCOME**

It is always beneficial to spend a few moments after a lesson evaluating how it went, but your evaluation does not have to be a complicated process. Take three colored pencils – green, yellow and red, for example – and mark up your plan. What was good? Underline it in green. What was bad? Underline this in red. Is there anything that could be improved? Underline this in yellow and make a few notes. This will not only help you the next time you go through the same material with a future class, it will help you plan upcoming lessons better for the class you have now!

### **DIFFERENT TEACHERS WILL WRITE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LESSON PLANS.**

Some may choose to include curriculum objectives as required by their administrations, and others may conduct their lessons from a skeletal outline. No matter where you fall in the spectrum of written plans, as long as you walk through these six points for lesson planning, both you and your students will have a positive experience with the material you present in class.



# The Upside of Errors: When and Why to Avoid Correcting Students

**"I TAUGHT MATH IN MY HOME COUNTRY," A STUDENT SHARES ON CAREER DAY. THE TEACHER RAISES HER EYEBROWS AND WAITS FOR THE STUDENT TO CONTINUE.**

"I mean, I taught math in my home country." This is a perfect example of when not correcting an ESL student is the best way to handle an error. By signaling her student with a small gesture, the teacher helps the student understand that he made an error. He thinks back to what he said, and then produces the correct structure. This is what in language studies is called self-correction.

Self-correction is just what it sounds like – when students correct their own mistakes rather than depending on the teacher to correct them. Self-correction happens naturally in speech, both with first and second language learners and in spoken and written language. And students who are able to self-correct have many advantages over those who do not.

## SELF-CORRECTION BASICS

### 1 STUDENTS WHO SELF-CORRECT SHOW THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE.

They are able to recognize mistakes, even in their own speaking and writing, and know what the correct structure should look like. They are then able to produce that correct language on their own even if it is on the second try.

### 2 STUDENTS WHO SELF-CORRECT ARE MORE PREPARED FOR THE REAL WORLD.

They depend less on their teacher and more on themselves, and they take more responsibility for their own quality of language. When they do this, they can better function in real life language situations and are able to better communicate with native speakers, even when they make mistakes, because they are able to identify and correct

those mistakes without help from someone else.

### 3 SELF-CORRECTION BEGETS INCREASED AWARENESS.

Students must have some level of self-awareness when it comes to their language use if they are going to self-correct. But as students learn to self-correct, they become more aware of their language use and therefore any mistakes they are making. When students are more aware of mistakes, they make fewer. As a result, they become better at self-correcting. Getting students to self-correct, then, begins a positive cycle of awareness and correct language production.

## DEVELOPING SELF-CORRECTING STUDENTS

Self-correction can be developed. For students with little experience self-correcting, you can give them sentences with errors that they need to correct. Spending a few minutes on this type of activity each day will increase student awareness of language errors. Creating examples inspired by actual student errors is a good way to make sure your sentence corrections will make a real impact on how your students speak. You can also use examples depicting errors common with speakers of your students' first language. You may also create examples that highlight grammatical concepts you have recently taught in class. Each of these may serve a different purpose, but all of them will help your students become better self-correctors.

Another way to encourage error awareness and self-correction is to signal your students when they make an error. You can use verbal signals, asking them to repeat themselves for example, or use simple physical clues like raising your eyebrows. If students still struggle with identifying their mistakes, give a more obvious signal like raising your hand when they make an error. The more natural your signals are, and the more

subtle they are, the more prepared your students will be for self-correcting on their own.

## HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Making students aware of their mistakes is like walking a thin line – too much and you will end up discouraging your students rather than empowering them. For this reason, remember what level your students are at. Don't expect perfect speech from beginning level students, and don't expect them to correct every error they make. For any student, when errors occur in many contexts, try focusing on one or two and let the rest slide (for now). Building a student's foundation in self-correction is often a slow process and one that should not be rushed. You can always help them tackle more areas of error later, and you want them to feel good about the language they are producing.

## CREATING A CULTURE OF SELF-CORRECTION CAN BE CHALLENGING.

Sometimes students will realize their mistakes on their own. Other times the teacher will have to offer a signal that self-correction is needed. She may make a physical signal or say something like, "What was that? Excuse me?" Though establishing a classroom culture where students self-correct may be challenging and time consuming at first, it is well worth it as your students become more effective and more confident English users. They become more independent and are ready to take their English skills out into the real world.

# 5 Worst Mistakes All Beginner ESL Teachers Make (And You Too?)

Oscar Wilde once said, "Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes". This holds true for everyone starting out in a new career, and ESL teachers are no exception. But one thing is accepting we'll make mistakes as we go and chalk it up to a lack of experience, and another is completely ignoring the worst kind of mistakes you could make. Since anyone can learn from their mistakes, then we can certainly learn from the five worst mistakes beginner ESL teachers make.

## 5 WORST ESL MISTAKES

### 1 TAKING UP ALL OF THE TALKING TIME

In an ESL class, what is the most common reason students are enrolled? They want to SPEAK English! And what happens when the teacher speaks most of the time? They don't have enough chances to actually practice their speaking skills. Those who are new to ESL teaching often make this very crucial mistake: They take up too much of the talking time, either because they feel uncomfortable around silence or long pauses, or because they are over-enthusiastic to share their knowledge. So clearly, hogging most of the talking time is out of the question. But, how to find the right balance between student talking time and teacher talking time?

As a general rule of thumb, students should speak for 70% of the class time, while teachers speak for the remaining 30%. These percentages could be tweaked in cases where students are absolute beginners (50-50), or at the other end of the spectrum, very advanced learners in need of intensive speaking practice (90-10). This means that in most cases, your participation should be limited to giving instructions and explaining essential points, but above all to eliciting response from students and facilitating all types of speaking activities.

### 2 IGNORING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENTS

ESL teachers should be friendly and strive to bond with students in order to achieve the best learning outcomes. But there's a line between being friendly and being a friend. A teacher is meant to be an authority figure, one that is most definitely not on equal terms with students. This is a very common mistake in young teachers, especially because they might be the same age as their students. It's all right to share some personal things and talk about family, pets, interests or hobbies. But you must never let it get too personal. Any personal information shared must be supplied to give students context when they are learning something new. It is not meant to be shared so you may be accepted by students. This is when the lines become blurred and students get confused. You lose all authority and any effective classroom management is severely compromised.

Be on friendly terms, talk about your dog or what you did last weekend, but make sure students feel there is a boundary that can't be crossed.

### 3 POOR OR INCONSISTENT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

This is one of the mistakes that is often made due to a lack of experience. Classroom management is not an exact science: it's not like teaching the past simple tense. Each group of student is different and rules must be set as a group. The problem stems from the fact that new teachers may not have a clearly defined teaching style. So, they either become too strict or too lax. There are plenty of articles you can read on effective classroom management: you may agree with some of the techniques, you may disagree with others and choose to implement your own. For example, you may choose to forego stickers as a means of rewarding students, and choose another method. It's not about being stricter,

but rather being consistent. There's nothing worse for a group of students than empty promises or weak threats. Once you define how you'll manage your class, stick to it!

### 4 FORGETTING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Some teachers are so focused on teaching things about the English culture, they completely ignore their students'. Some gestures ESL teachers commonly use in the classroom, like the gesture for OK, may be very rude in other cultures. In some countries, students may be used to lecturing, and may not react positively when you propose a game. This is a mistake ESL teachers make above all in foreign countries where the culture is very different from Western culture, like Arabic or Oriental cultures. Learn about their customs, especially greetings, and use this information to create a positive learning environment.

### 5 NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION ON STUDENTS' BACKGROUNDS AND NEEDS

How many beginner ESL teachers start a lesson with a new group and don't even find out where they've studied English before, how long, and with which results?

What if you have a student who has studied English countless times, off and on, over the last 20 years, but is still at an intermediate level? It doesn't matter if you obtain this information from your department head or from the students themselves -- this is essential information to have if you want your students to advance, to make progress in their English language skills.

**DON'T BE AFRAID OF MAKING MISTAKES, FOR MISTAKES WILL SURELY BE MADE. THERE ARE VALUABLE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM EACH AND EVERY ONE. START BY AVOIDING THE ONES LISTED ABOVE, AND YOU'LL START YOUR TEACHING CAREER OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT.**

# 5 Mistakes All Online Teachers Make - And How To Avoid Them

**ONLINE TEACHERS ARE LUCKY IN THAT THEY CAN WORK FROM HOME ALMOST ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD BUT THEY ALSO ENCOUNTER A UNIQUE SET OF PROBLEMS.**

Of course some issues are similar to problems experienced in classrooms however online teachers will have to deal with them differently. Here are some common mistakes that online teachers make.

## 5 MOST COMMON MISTAKES WHEN TEACHING ONLINE

### 1 CAMERA

If you use a webcam for your classes, please give some consideration to your appearance and background. Just because you work at home does not mean that you can wear your pajamas during classes. Dressing appropriately, in a professional manner, will help earn your students' respect and set the tone for your interactions with them. Keep in mind that students will not only see you but also everything behind you. Beds and bathrooms should not be seen in the background. Find a quiet, neutral place that reveals little personal information. It is great getting to know students but they should not see certain parts of your house, family members walking behind you, or pets. You need to show that you have a professional approach to your work and take their education seriously.

### 2 MICROPHONE PLACEMENT

Microphone placement is also another important thing that teachers need to think about. Online teachers must use a headset. If you do not, students will be distracted by your typing, clicking, and other sounds but using a headset reduces the amount of other noises they hear and allows them to focus more on what you are saying. Microphone placement is important because it will affect the sound quality of your classes. If it is directly in front of your mouth, your breathing and speak-

ing will cause students to hear sounds like those you would expect to hear if a caller is outside on a windy day. You should test your microphone placement by recording yourself speaking into it or by asking a friend or family member to test it out with you using a program like Skype or Google Voice. This will give you some insight as to where it should be placed. Generally the microphone should be off to one side and either a little above or below your mouth.

### 3 OVER TALKING

Online teachers often spend too much time speaking during lessons especially if they are not used to teaching one-on-one lessons. Since online classes are generally short, teachers should really maximize student talking time. If you use certain teaching material, allow students to read directions and anything else you may be tempted to read for them. Use your speaking time to ask questions, prompt longer responses, give feedback, and model pronunciation. Encourage students to ask questions. For example, instead of having a student say each word on a vocabulary list after you, have him read the words aloud, practice the pronunciation of any words he had difficulty with, and ask if there are any new words on the list. This saves a lot of time because you only have to focus on what the student needs help with.

### 4 LACK OF VARIETY

Online teachers focus most of their attention on speaking and listening. These are very important skills but in order to learn English, students should focus on all aspects of the language which includes reading and writing. In order to make the best use of your time, you can ask students to read materials before class to prepare them for lessons and assign written work occasionally as homework. Some students may not be interested in improving their writing skills but be sure to establish what they want to get out of their lessons so that you can plan classes appropriately. Encourage stu-

dents to consider the importance of these skills and explain how including them in lessons will not take significant time away from other activities.

### 5 NOT ENOUGH FEEDBACK

It is important to provide students with written feedback and evaluations. It can be hard to structure this without homework assignments or tests but students should have a record of their progress and be able to review their mistakes on their own time. Online learners must do some self study activities in addition to taking online classes but without direction it may be challenging for them to know what to focus on. Providing students with feedback will help you both identify which areas they struggle with and you can recommend additional practice exercises to help them.

### THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE THINGS THAT ONLINE TEACHERS SHOULD BE AWARE OF.

Bonus Tip: It is nice to know what time of day it is for your students. This is a very simple thing but the class you teach in the morning might be in the evening for your student so you should adjust your greeting accordingly. This can be a challenge but it lets students know that you are invested in them enough to know what time and day your class is in their country. It just personalizes your experience a little more. Good luck!



# ESL Teacher's Meltdown: Problems & Solutions

**FOR THE MOST PART, ESL TEACHING IS SURPRISINGLY STRESS-FREE AND A GREAT WAY TO LIVE A FANTASTIC LIFESTYLE IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY. BUT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE BLACK DOG PAYS US ALL A VISIT.**

This is often brought on when the daily challenges that create a positive amount of stress all accumulate at once, and the pressure becomes too much. There are days when many ESL teachers just want to scream and explode in a fit of rage due to the pent up frustrations of a long day where nothing just seem to go the way it should. This article will examine some of the leading problems in the ESL workplace and try to find a solution.

## ESL TEACHER'S MELTDOWN: PROBLEMS & SOLUTIONS

### 1 PROBLEM - LOW SALARIES

Always in the number one spot for ESL teaching gripes. Some schools offer appalling salaries to decent teachers who always put the effort into classes. Unfortunately, ESL teaching isn't one of the highest-paid professions out there, but in many cases, the wages do not suit the job. Simply compare the different wages throughout different countries. A first-time ESL teacher at a language centre in Jakarta, Indonesia makes around US\$750 a month, a teacher in Korea would be on over US\$2000. Additionally, with most jobs out there, the rate of pay will go up with inflation: not in ESL teaching. After a little snooping around, teachers will generally find that the wages have been the same for almost eight years in many cases. This is a cause of great concern to many teachers.

Solution - Besides from Prozac and living frugally, one of the best ways to deal with the low pay is to get out there and find some extra teaching work. Pick up a few privates here and there, or look into teaching on the in-

ternet. But do it on the sly, and don't let your employer find out as there may be harsh contractual implications for any outside work.

### 2 PROBLEM - LOW TEACHER'S ROOM MORALE

Yup, we've all been there. The harmonious nature of the staff room that was present when you first arrived at the school has all but fizzled out. It started with one person, then a few weeks there were three people whinging and moaning. All of a sudden, a month later the entire staff room is infected with it and there just seems no way out. This low morale has an impact on everything, the way that staff members view their job, their employer, and even the country that they have grown to love has turned into a cesspool of bitter hatred.

Solution - Discreetly bring the matter up with your academic manager or HR go-to person. They have been working in ESL teaching long enough, and sure enough, the low-morale issue is a common occurrence that probably happens at even the best of language centres. Your HR manager or Academic Coordinator should provide you with some good advice, while acting on your concerns by putting an end to the bad vibes in the staff room. Once you begin to notice the negativity beginning to show, try to separate yourself from it and do your lesson planning in a classroom or simply go outside and take a walk. Falling victim to the low morale is something that can easily happen to us all.

### 3 PROBLEM - MANAGEMENT

Always another chief complaint from teachers that often arises is the issue of management. The reason for this is management are ultimately the ones who are in charge. Whether or not they're right or wrong, the management are the ones who have the power to make the decisions. In many cases, language centre management has their eyes firmly fixated on one

thing - the almighty dollar. This is true in most cases, and often this immense focus on money will have an impact on you directly. For example, a student wants to study IELTS. They can barely string a sentence together, but they are insistent on doing an IELTS course and will not settle for any other course. You are the lucky chosen one who is dealt this cruel hand of teaching this stubborn student for 60 hours when she can't answer the question 'how are you?' Other areas which management have a controlling hand over are contract negotiations, marketing and course material.

Solution - Take it easy, it isn't your problem. Give the student what they want, that's what they paid for. Be honest with the student and tell them they are not suited for the class, and maybe, just maybe the student will listen to you. But otherwise, just sit back, dish out the work, and don't let the right or wrong decisions of others get to you.

### 4 PROBLEM - LAZY STUDENTS

This one doesn't usually bother me, but seems to bother some teachers immensely. Lazy students can become a real pain in the backside, especially after you have gone through the painstaking effort to plan a class that is fun, while educational at the same time. Nothing can be more frustrating than this, especially when it takes places on the busiest day of the week, a Sunday.

Solution - Two solutions, the first - let them be, it will be their own demise. The second, bargain with them. Take away certain privileges for laziness, while rewarding them with activities and other treats for completing the work.

### 5 PROBLEM - ARROGANT FELLOW-TEACHERS

Sure, we've all worked with them. They are the type of people who

speak in the Queen's English and proper British accent, who talk to their colleagues in an identical manner as they would address a misbehaving student. You must look out for these people, as generally they walk around with an inflated sense of self-importance. These are the people who discipline a teacher because a student left a paper in the room. These are the worst people to deal with in ESL teaching that can really make your blood boil, especially when they talk to you in a condescending manner as if you were a child.

**Solution** - Take a note of each of the encounters and think of the reasons why you personally felt it was offensive, for example, he spoke in a way that showed total disrespect, or he lectured you in front of a student. Make a note of when the incidents occurred and some details, and pass it on to the Academic Coordinator. It is their job to address your concerns directly with the arrogant sod, taking his ego down a few notches.

## 6 PROBLEM – SCHEDULES

Ah, it's the time of the week when everyone crowds around as if it were the lottery. There's a certain sense of dread and excitement at the same time. After having a number of classes finished this week, you know that either the classes will be immediately replaced with more, or you could, by some stroke of luck, have a relatively easy week where you can slip off early and catch a film. But, you know what? It's a lot worse than that. A teacher's contract has finished, and it's your job to teach a morning class from 9am to 11am, and a new evening class as well! A split shift! Jeez, I'm a teacher, not a bloody chef!

**Solution** - The golden rule... If you signed the contract that states that you would work those hours, there's more chance of that dream wedding with Britney Spears than getting the schedules changed. But, if your weekly hours exceed the contracted hours, make sure that you are adequately compensated for the additional work.

## 7 PROBLEM - TEXTBOOKS NOT BEING RETURNED

A favourite complaint by ESL teachers from over 160 countries, across five continents throughout the world.

There is nothing more annoying than looking for your 'Introduction to Academic Book Volume 3', only to discover that the serial hoarder has stashed it away with 17 other of the schools frequently used textbooks. And the worst part, he's not around to unlock his freakin' locker.

**Solution** - Make your life easier and photocopy the books yourself. That way you can draw in the books, fill in the answers, draw funny little moustaches on the people - whatever, really! The second option is to discreetly bring the better to the Academic Manager who will quickly bring about an end to the hoarder's textbook stash.

### AFTER A TOUGH DAY AT THE OFFICE, MANY ESL TEACHERS THINK THAT THEY WOULD RATHER BE DOING ANYTHING ELSE THAN TEACHING.

However, after the end of a day like this, a new day will bring a completely new set of challenges, some good, and some bad. Teaching isn't the only career that boasts stresses, but every job in every field has their its benefits and disadvantages – while many are a lot worse than teaching.

# 7 Most Common ESL Problems and How to Solve Them

**AS FAR AS YOUR ESL CLASS IS CONCERNED, YOU COULD FACE A MULTITUDE OF PROBLEMS – OR NONE AT ALL.**

A typical ESL class, anywhere in the world, has its own set of typical problems and challenges. Is there any way to avoid them? Not likely. Is there any way to prepare for them? Absolutely! And here are the 7 most typical problems you'll face as an ESL teacher, each one followed by some ways to deal with them.

## **7 MOST COMMON ESL PROBLEMS AND HOW TO SOLVE THEM**

### **1 STUDENTS SPEAK MORE OF THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE THAN ENGLISH**

The lower the students' level or ages, the more probable it is that they will speak their native language most of the time. Some will even chat in pairs or small groups, completely oblivious to what is going on in class.

Solution: Now, each ESL class is different, and they all have different goals, but no matter what their age or level, students must understand that they must at the very least try to speak as much English as they can, even if it is for simple greetings, requests or statements. For younger students, turn it into a game. Create a chart with the students' names and give those who did not speak their native language throughout the class a star. Or create a point penalty system. Once a student reaches a certain number of points, they must do something in front of the class, like tell a story or answer questions from classmates. These might not work for older students. But they will certainly try to communicate in English if you pretend you don't speak their native language.

### **2 STUDENTS TAKE CONTROL OF THE LESSON**

You've probably seen this happen. A student comes into class all excited about something that's happened and dying to tell everyone. They get everyone else excited about the topic and before you know it you have a group of students

who've completely taken over. Another common situation, particularly with youngsters, is when they propose all sorts of changes and/or improvements to an activity you've set out for them.

Solution: Take control back. In the first case, firmly, yet kindly, let your students know that you have to get the lesson underway. Tell them that if they finish their work, they can have a few minutes at the end of the class to talk about whatever has them so excited. In the second case, firmly tell them that you have already planned the lesson/activity, but that you will certainly include their ideas next time. Don't forget to thank them for sharing or providing feedback!

### **3 ONE STUDENT DOMINATES THE LESSON**

This is the type of student I like to call the "eager beaver": they always raise their hands first or just blurt out the answer with absolutely no regard for the other students in the class. They are often competitive and like to win.

Solution: Never call out an eager beaver in front of the class. This enthusiasm should not be squashed: it should simply be channeled in the right direction. Say, "I know you know the answer, Juan, but I'd love to hear from someone else". Also try this: let the eager student be your helper for the day. Tell him/her the job is to help classmates find the right answers or help those who are having trouble completing an exercise.

### **4 THEY ARE TOO DEPENDENT**

The other side of the coin is when you have students who constantly seek your help. They may ask you to help them complete an exercise or just blurt out they can't/don't know how to do something on their own.

Solution: It's very important to empower students and help them feel that they can indeed do it. Say you give them an exercise in which they have to decide which article to use, "a" or "an". Look at the first item "apple" and ask your student, "Is it a apple or an apple? What sounds right to you?" Once they give you the correct answer, tell them to try the next one. And the next one. "See you CAN do it! Good job!" Sometimes students feel overwhelmed by the blanks, and all they

need is a little nudge.

### **5 STUDENTS ARE BORED OR UNMOTIVATED**

Students eyes are glazed over, and you blame the boring coursebook or the Future Perfect.

Solution: It's a hard truth, but the reason your students are bored is YOU. It is your responsibility to engage students and keep the lesson interesting – no matter what you are teaching. Teaching the Future Continuous tense? There are ways to make the topic more engaging. Talking about business? There are ways to make the topic more fun.

### **6 STUDENTS ARRIVE LATE OR DISRUPT THE CLASS**

A cell phone rings, while a latecomer joins the class. You barely say two words and another student shows up. And the interruptions go on and are worse in larger groups.

Solution: Set the classroom rules from the start. Ask students to turn off cell phones and other technological devices at the start of class. Give your students a five to ten- minute grace period for arriving, but tell them they won't be able to join the class after that.

### **7 THEY DON'T DO HOMEWORK**

Some students never do homework or any work outside the classroom. This is often the case with adults who say they never have time.

Solution: Young learners and teens have no choice. They must do their homework and if they don't, simply notify the parents that the student is not completing tasks to satisfaction. As for adults, give them options. Tell them to do at least one five-minute exercise a day (or a week). Ask them how much they can commit to. Be clear in communicating that that may fall behind and not meet their language learning goals.

**DON'T LEAVE ANYTHING TO CHANCE. HAVE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT. HAVE RULES AND STICK TO THEM. FOR IF YOU DON'T, YOU'RE LEAVING YOURSELF WIDE OPEN TO TROUBLE.**



# When Things Go Wrong: Turn a Disaster Lesson into a Triumph

**IT HAPPENS TO EVEN THE BEST TEACHERS: A WELL THOUGHT OUT, CAREFULLY PLANNED LESSON GOES HORRIBLY WRONG AND YOU ARE STUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF CLASS WITH CONFUSED, FRUSTRATED, AND DISENGAGED LEARNERS.**

Students can react to material in different ways than you anticipated and new activities may take less time, be more challenging, or not work out quite the way you expected. Never continue following a lesson plan that is failing. This will only waste everyone's time and students will not get the most out of their lesson with you. It is hard to think of new ideas and come up with an alternate plan during a lesson but this is the best course of action.

**HOW TO TURN A DISASTER LESSON INTO A WELL-DESERVED VICTORY**

## 1 WHAT WENT WRONG?

Identify what went wrong so that you will not repeat the mistake with another class. This will also help you determine if it is the lesson or activity itself or the particular students you are working with that led to this issue in the first place. If students do not understand the material you are covering, rephrase your introduction with mini comprehension checks throughout. Ask students to explain to you what you are teaching and even translate it if necessary to ensure that everyone has a more thorough understanding of the lesson material. If an activity did not work out the way you planned or finished earlier than expected, you can stall a little by asking students to demonstrate their knowledge of the material while you decide what to do next. These are two very common occurrences especially for new teachers who assume that students clearly understand material after just a short introduction and are still learning about student behavior, lesson plans, and time management.

## 2 CHANGE COURSE

You are going to have to finish the class and maximize the class time you have with your learners so decide how to proceed. Often it takes only about five minutes to realize something is wrong, decide to change course, and transition into another activity. The longer you have been teaching, the more backup activities you will have stored in your memory so draw on your past experiences for inspiration. Thinking on your feet in front of an audience, regardless of its size, is stressful but remain calm and remember that whatever you choose also has to require no real preparation and only the materials you have in your classroom. By keeping this in mind you will automatically focus on simpler exercises. Once you have thought of another activity you can relate to the topic you have been talking about, segue into it as if it were a planned part of the lesson. You can say something like "OK, I think we have had enough of the board game for today, now I'd like you to ~." An activity that was finished too soon or was uninteresting to students has effectively been pushed aside with this brief sentence and the class can move forward.

## 3 END ON A HIGH NOTE

Finish the class with a short, fun activity that you know students enjoy. This can be a familiar warm up activity like ESL Shiritori or an exercise like Crisscross which can be adapted to any topic. Your lesson can then end on a positive note and this will be the most recent memory students have of your class when they walk out your door for the day. Students will forgive failed activities from time to time if you do not force them to suffer through them for long and come back strong after realizing your mistake.

**BY TURNING A DISASTER LESSON AROUND, YOU ARE SAVING YOURSELF AND HELPING YOUR STUDENTS.**

This is a skill and as such requires a lot of time and experience to improve. One way to help you prepare for this unfortunate yet inevitable situation is to plan an extra activity for each lesson (this is where BusyTeacher.org is your best friend). This can be something short and should function as a review. It will be easier to transition if you already have a back up plan and you can simply expand on it or repeat it several times if you have more time than you expected. If you do not use the activity at the end of your class period, you can use it as a review in the next lesson. It is just that easy. Good luck!

# Becoming A Super High School Teacher: 8 Little-Known Secrets

Any teacher who has spent some time teaching in schools (especially in Asia) soon realises that small class sizes are somewhat of a distant mirage - a myth that only a fortunate few who work at international schools have the opportunity to experience. Many government schools often have class sizes that regularly exceed 50 students! Imagine teaching 50 fifteen year-olds who have no interest in English. What would you do to capture their attention and get them interested in English? Teachers should draw on their own experience as a learner and recall the teachers who had an impact on them when they were the age of their students. The boring French teacher, who droned on and on about masculine and feminine words, was not really awe inspiring and generally sent students to sleep quicker than you could say 'bonjour'. It is the teacher who is a little eccentric, unpredictable and, ultimately, inspiring who manages to capture the attention of the students.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN BECOME A 'PRO' HIGH SCHOOL ESL TEACHER:

### 1 GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT

If you want the best result from stubborn high school students, the most effective technique is to give them exactly what they want. If they want games, then give them games! The great part about giving students what they want is this can be used as a bargaining tool in order for you to get them to complete work. Senior high school students can be difficult to enforce discipline, so one fantastic way is to negotiate with them. If they complete the required exercises, then they can play a game at the end of class! When it comes to exercises that can be a little 'dry', edit them so they can talk about things that your students are interested in. Find out about some of their favourite pop stars, movie stars and base the exercises on that.

### 2 IF POSSIBLE, STAY AWAY FROM THE GRAMMAR!

In many cases, it is the task of a local English teacher to teach the grammar.

Your task as a native speaker should be encouraging students to use the language.

Don't focus on grammar, keep the emphasis on communication. Of course, if a student makes a grammatical error on a regular basis, do correct them. However, provide usable examples of the grammar within context that the student could use, not out of a textbook.

### 3 DON'T BE PREDICTABLE

Predictable teaching means that students very quickly switch off and continue with their own thing. Keep them focused on what is happening in the classroom by being a little unpredictable. Try asking 'trick' questions or saying 'Good Afternoon' in the morning. This tests their English and checks that they are tuned in. Speak loudly, speak softly, just don't be boring and monotonous.

### 4 HAVE A LAUGH!

Be prepared to laugh at them and laugh at yourself. Students generally respect a teacher who they can have a joke with. Generally, this works in the favour of the teacher, as most ESL/EFL teachers cannot speak the L1 of the student. If the student can joke to the teacher using English, well hey! They are using English! When you have a laugh and a joke with them (in English), then you are providing them with English, albeit in the form of a joke.

### 5 MAKE IT REAL

One thing that we find works really well is to throw away the grammar books and get the students to work on a skill that they could use later in life or with their further education at university. Ongoing projects are a great way to teach language that is used on an everyday basis, and helps them build on language structures that they may eventually involve in the workplace. Some projects that help build on real life English include:

- Work as a group to plan a company, then present.
- Research and report on what's happening in another country.
- Devise an advertising campaign for

a produce.

- Work as a group and plan a travel itinerary around the world – decide as a group where you would go and what you would do.

### 6 THE PSYCHOLOGY OF A FUN CLASS

Starting off with a game and ending with a game is what we refer to as a 'Sandwich of Fun'. By starting with an activity and ending with an activity, students generally forget about the 'boring' grammar exercises or reading activities.

### 7 SET FAIR RULES WITH THEIR INPUT

When you set the rules with the students, you create a fair environment where the students can voice their expectations of the teacher. If all of the students agree to the rules of both teacher and students, cooperation should be easy to maintain. Also set some fun rules as well, for example, make it a rule that students should answer the question 'How are you?' with anything other than 'I'm Fine'.

### 8 FOCUS ON STUDENTS WHO WANT TO LEARN

Often when faced with classes where 46 out of 54 students don't want to learn, it's a good idea to put the activity on the board and then focus on assisting those students who want to learn. Without totally neglecting the needs of all students in the class, simply assist those students who really want it. Focusing on a student who doesn't want you help takes valuable teaching time away that could be used on providing assistance to a student who truly appreciates and wants to further their English skills.

**PRACTICALLY ANY TEACHER HAS THE ABILITY TO BECOME AN INSPIRING TEACHER TO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS; IT IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF WALKING INTO THE CLASSROOM WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AND BY FOLLOWING THE ABOVE TIPS AND TRICKS.** Even with more difficult classes, teachers can still be an inspiration to their students and provide them with a set of useful language skills that will stay with them forever.

# Behavior Issues: 7 Ideas to Keep Kids Organized and Productive

**WHEN WE THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING WE DEAL WITH ON A DAILY BASIS IN THE CLASSROOM, ALL THE THINGS THAT REQUIRE OUR ATTENTION AND PATIENCE, THE MOST DIFFICULT ISSUE OF ALL IS BEHAVIOR.**

We can manage children comfortably most of the time, in spite of the little things. The excessive energy, challenges with material, the fact that they study more or study less, when they forget things, lose things, all this and more is normal to us. Now, when things start to get out of hand and there is a lack of respect, it stops being fun for everyone. Issues with behavior are sometime hard to deal with since we need a great deal of information and resources. However, there are many things we can do. If we address these issues constructively, the kids will feel like part of the process and the result, will be so much better.

**TRY THESE 7 IDEAS TO KEEP YOUR KIDS ORGANIZED AND PRODUCTIVE**

## 1 MAKE RULES CLEAR

If there are rules in society, there are rules at school and in the classroom. Kids need to know what is expected of them and how the classroom will be organized. Teaching them the rules is just as important as teaching anything else. One option is to make a set of rules yourself and share them with the class on the first day. You can ask them what they think of the rules and why they believe these rules are important. With older kids, you might want to try a more democratic approach. If rules come from them and as a group, accepting those rules will come more naturally because they'll feel like part of the process.

## 2 APPROPRIATE VS INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

There are things that should be done and others that shouldn't, it's that sim-

ple, and it should be to them as well. Here is an interesting and constructive activity you can do with the kids. Make a list on the board of things that happen in any classroom good and bad. Then on poster board make two columns titled "appropriate" and on the other side "inappropriate". They read the list and tell you what is appropriate and inappropriate. When you are done, go over it again and cross check the list with the rules set previously.

With young children, use flash cards that show what is right and what isn't.

## 3 CONSEQUENCES

As they say, "rules are meant to be broken". This may be true, but in your classroom there are things you can do to avoid it. This is where another activity comes in handy: The Consequence chart. Children need to understand there are natural consequences and logical consequences to things they do. For instance you could ask them, "what could happen if someone throws a pen at a fellow classmate?" Wait for their answers, then if necessary elicit more. A typical answer from a student would be "you would get mad" or "it might hit someone on the face and hurt them". Both are correct, the first is a logical consequence and the second a natural consequence.

## 4 INCENTIVES

We all remember our old buddy the star chart. Teachers have been using it for ages and some still do although, many teachers now prefer a different system for rewarding their students. Giving them an incentive when they behave well encourages them to continue doing so. Keep in mind that incentives are tricky sometimes. Remember, they are not a way to coax them into doing things, they should be perceived a consequence of good work or behavior -- a good way for them to see there are all types of consequences.

## 5 USE TASKS OR ACTIVITIES SUCH AS GAMES TO REINFORCE BEHAVIOR

You should always make classroom rules, talk about consequences and address issues with behavior in a constructive, nurturing and non-threatening manner. Use games and activities to encourage your kids to talk about what is happening. Games are more natural to them and while they are playing, learning also comes naturally.

## 6 CONSIDER WHAT MIGHT BE CAUSING THE PROBLEMS

If problems with behavior become frequent, you have to analyze what is causing the problem. It could be a reaction to something going on in the class, another child, lesson organization, type of activities you choose or because the lesson is too difficult or too easy. When a child misbehaves all the time, it is rarely just in your classroom and quite likely in general. You might need a meeting with his/her parents. If this is necessary, be prepared for that meeting and explain to parents everything you do in class to teach and talk about appropriate behavior. Explain what is happening in detail and then listen to them without jumping to conclusions.

## 7 ORGANIZATION IS KEY

Start and end all your lessons the same way. You could start with a song or game and the ending could be similar. Make sure the way you organize the lesson is clear and make sure to be prepared: avoid confusion or last minute changes. Kids don't react well to confusion and chaos, and they'll do a great job in letting you know just how they feel about it!

**WORKING WITH CHILDREN IS INCREDIBLY REWARDING AND BECAUSE THEY NEED A LOT FROM US, LESSONS NEED TO BE WELL PREPARED WITH TIME AND DEDICATION.**



# Dealing with Outrageous Behavior without Losing Your Sanity

## LAST SEMESTER, I WAS TEACHING AN ONLINE CLASS FOR ESL TEACHERS AND FUTURE ESL TEACHERS.

There were about 10 students in class and one no-show — a student that failed to come to any of the live chats, post on the discussion boards, or turn in assignments, and was generally a “phantom” on the roll sheet, despite automatically generated reminders from the university, copied to me, and my own nearly daily updates that went out to her, along with the rest of the class.

I did not lose sleep over the student’s nonappearance, honestly, as it’s fairly common in online classes for adults — students sometimes get busy, forget about their class, or decide it’s not a priority in their rush of adult responsibilities, all understandable. This situation was unusual, however, in that two days before the close of the class, as I was saying good-bye to the students who had chosen to attend and accepting their final projects, I received an email from the no-show student. In this email, she apologized for not checking in before, gave the more-or-less generic “dead grandma” excuse, further elaborated with an explanation that she had been given the wrong information by her advisor and had thought the course was two months long and self-paced, and in signing on, had just realized it was not. She then calmly proceeded to outline a plan for completing the course work in a week.

Somewhat flabbergasted, I emailed her back and told her that wasn’t possible as the course was hard to complete in a regular term, much less a week. This rejection then set off a shower of emails that went on for a couple of weeks, roping in the poor advisor who had given the “misinformation,” the registrar’s office, and the dean of the education department, before it was finally decided Ms. “No-Show” should enroll in a later section of the same course. Throughout it all, the young woman’s tone was hostile, blaming, and entitled: both the

advisor and I had done her wrong, and she was entitled to some sort of compensation. Young students shuffling in toward the end of the course claiming confusion and asking to do “make up” work is nothing new, of course. What distinguished this was the young lady’s confrontational tone and entitled attitude — both of which instructors increasingly find themselves addressing in students, for a variety of reasons.

## 5 REASONS FOR HOSTILE AND ENTITLED STUDENT BEHAVIOR

### 1 INCREASE IN ANGER IN SOCIETY IN GENERAL

It has been noted that there is increasing hostility in general, from “road rage” to workplace shootings, or at any rate, that people express anger more openly than they would have in the past. So the student infuriated at her instructor over some perceived wrong would have in the past vented to her diary or friends but today feels all right about expressing the anger openly.

### 2 NOT KNOWING APPROPRIATE EXPRESSION OF ANGER

This more open expression of anger in society leads to the next problem — not knowing how to appropriately express anger. Because it is an emotion that has traditionally been suppressed, not a lot of students know how to appropriately express anger and may engage in a lot of nonproductive behaviors such as yelling or “flaming,” the online equivalent, instead of calmly expressing what they feel is wrong and what they would like to see done.

### 3 THE RECESSION

The world-wide recession, perhaps one of the worst in history, has

put a strain on many people, and there is more resultant dysfunctional behavior, like displaced hostility. It is generally easier to vent on your instructor than confront your boss or bank.

## 4 MORE STUDENTS SEEING THEMSELVES AS “CUSTOMERS”

The young lady in the anecdote above mentioned in her emails several times how much she had paid for the course — clearly a consumer view — and that this entitled her to certain rights, presumably a grade. This is of course not unnatural, with students more and more taking on sometimes huge debts to go to college, but it also shifts the relationship somewhat from teacher-student to service provider-client.

## 5 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Along with the consumer view of student-teacher relations comes institutional support for the student — this is the college’s client, after all, and the customer is always right. Twenty years ago if a student claimed temporary insanity or whatnot for her failure to attend class, there would have been little recourse for her as the dean and department chairs may have smiled sympathetically and then told the instructor to go ahead and award the student an “F” as adults are responsible for finding their way to class. Today the initial instinct of the dean was to support the student, agreeing she had indeed been “misinformed” about the class. Again, this change is caused by a differing view of the role of teachers — we are not here to educate but accommodate the “customer” at all costs.

## 4 METHODS FOR ADDRESSING HOSTILE STUDENTS

### 1 LISTEN TO THE STORY, NO MATTER HOW RIDICULOUS

The story after all may be the student’s reality. The student may indeed

believe that her advisor and teacher had conspired to misinform her the very month she was devastated by her grandmother's death. By hearing out the story and redirecting the student to the problem at hand — "I am so sorry all this has happened to you, but how are we going to address your attendance problem?" — the student and teacher can begin to collaborate on a solution.

## 2 REMAIN CALM

A mistake I made with the example student is that I got annoyed with her from the outset — that she emailed me as the course was about to end and was so confident everything was going to be okay. This annoyance came out in the emails and probably escalated rather than defused the situation. I will in the future remember to remain as calm, sympathetic, and as objective as possible: "Your grandmother died... that must have been so terrible for you." Remaining calm will go a long way to defuse the situation, as the student will see you as an ally, not adversary, in solving the problem.

## 3 DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

A thing I did correctly in the interaction was limit the interactions to email — a running written record which could be produced to show the student's hostility or that I had never said she could make up my class, if it became an issue.

## 4 SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES

Finally, the instructor should not in these situations just refuse the student's request — although it may be tempting — but be prepared to suggest alternatives, such as taking the course another term. This is likely to leave the student feeling at least partially satisfied.

**HOSTILE STUDENTS ARE NOT EASY TO DEAL WITH. BUT BY LISTENING, REMAINING CALM, DOCUMENTING EVERYTHING, AND SUGGESTING ALTERNATIVES, TEACHERS CAN EFFECTIVELY DISARM THOSE STUDENTS.**

# Top 10 Tips to Deal With Indiscipline in the Classroom

It happens to every teacher at some point. Sometimes it is with the first class. Other times a teacher gets a few good years under his or her belt before it hits. Sometimes it seems like it happens in class after class. The problem that all too often rears its ugly head is lack of discipline. Every teacher experiences it, and no teacher likes it. The good news is that there are ways to handle indiscipline in the classroom. Here are some tips to try with your students.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH INDISCIPLINE IN THE CLASSROOM

### 1 SET EXPECTATIONS EARLY

Set expectations early in the year. The old adage that a good teacher does not smile until after Christmas may or may not be true, but it is easier to lighten your leadership style as the year goes on rather than get stricter after being lenient. If it is too late to start the year off with a firm hand, you can always make a new start – with either a new calendar year or a new month or a new unit. Make sure your class knows that you are wiping the slate and that your expectations of them will no longer be compromised!

### 2 MAKE RULES TOGETHER

Let kids be involved in making the rules. Before dictating a set of classroom rules, ask your students how they would like their peers to behave. Have them discuss what kind of an environment they would like to have in class. By directing a class discussion, your students will define a set of rules that meet both their criteria and your own. Because they have set the expectations, they are more likely to follow the rules and to keep one another in check, freeing you to do things that are more important.

### 3 CONTACT PARENTS

Depending on where you teach and where your students come from, their parents may be an unexpected support when it comes to good behavior in the classroom. Often American parents will side with the child when it comes to conflicts in school, but if you teach students from other cultures, and it is very likely that you do, your students' parents will not automatically take their children's

side of things. In fact in many cultures, parents will automatically side with the teacher against their own child if there is a discipline issue. That is not to say that you should take advantage of either your students or their parents, just do not be afraid to approach your kids' parents if the situation necessitates it. Be warned, though, you may not want the child to act as interpreter if one is necessary.

### 4 INVITE VOLUNTEERS

Depending on the age of your students, you may even choose to ask parents into the classroom as volunteers for a day. Children may behave better if their parents are in the classroom with them. Not only that, if your parents interact with each other, the stories of how a certain child may behave in class could get back to mom and dad through other channels ultimately saving you an awkward and unpleasant conversation!

### 5 INVITE ANOTHER TEACHER

Trading teachers could be helpful in your quest for a composed classroom. If your students have gotten used to the way you operate class and what behavior you may let slide, having a different teacher for one or more periods of the day may spur them to act a little more restrained. Not only can the atmosphere of class change, your students will benefit from listening to another voice and another style of speech when another teacher stands in front of the class.

### 6 WHY, OH WHY?

Think about the reason behind the rudeness. Is it possible that your ESL students may be acting up to make up for a self-perceived inadequacy in their language abilities? If there is even the slightest possibility that insecurity may be behind classroom misbehavior, try to look past it and address the real issue. Does your student need confidence? Does she need a feeling of success? Does he need to feel equal to his peers? By addressing the issue rather than the symptoms, you will have a healthier and better-behaved set of students.

### 7 QUICK LEARNER DETECTED

It is also possible that a misbehaving student is bored with class because he is a quick learner. Though it may

seem counterintuitive, putting that child in a leadership role may give him the extra challenge he needs to engage in the classroom activities. He will not only not be bored -- he will have some investment in making sure the other students in class behave.

### 8 ATTENTION SPAN

Remembering the attention span of children can also help you keep your calm when kids act up in class. As a rule, estimate a child's attention span to be one minute for every year of his age. That means a seven year old will max out on attention at seven minutes. Keep the pace moving in class without spending too much time sitting in one place. Let your kids move around, go outside or work independently to keep the (stir) crazy bugs from biting.

### 9 RESPOND, NOT REACT

It is extremely important for teachers to remember to respond and not react. There is a big difference between the two. A person who reacts acts impulsively and out of emotion. The person who responds, on the other hand, takes more time before acting and separates his or her emotions from the decisions he makes. It is a good rule to follow in all areas of life, but it is especially important to remember when your class is just plain getting on your nerves. Do not let your emotions get the better of you but instead stay calm and make logical and intentional responses.

### 10 DISCIPLINE IN PRIVATE

Still, moments will come and days will come when one or more of your students will misbehave. The best way to address the situation is quickly and with as little disruption as possible. Refrain from disciplining any child in front of the class. Choose instead to have those conversations in private. If you respect your students, they are more likely to respect you.

**ULTIMATELY, NO CLASSROOM IS PERFECT. YOUR KIDS WILL HAVE GOOD AND BAD DAYS, AND YOU WILL, TOO.**

Do your best to keep your cool when your students start getting out of control. Tomorrow will be a new day with limitless potential and it may just be the right day to get off to a new start!



# Keep Your Cool: Tips for Handling Difficult Students

*Imagine this: you are trying to give a lesson on the past progressive tense.*

You stand up at the white board talking about agreement between the subject and the helping verb and that this tense is used to describe a continuous action that was happening at a specific point in the past. While most students are listening and concentrating, a child in the back taps his pencil, kicks his feet against the desk, leans back in his chair and then falls over on to the ground. With the clatter from the back come laughs from the front of the classroom, an end zone style dance from the student in question and a complete loss of concentration about any facet of English grammar. What is an ESL teacher to do?

**ALMOST EVERY TEACHER HAS HAD A DIFFICULT STUDENT IN ONE CLASS OR ANOTHER, AND SOME OF US ARE LUCKY ENOUGH TO HAVE ONE IN EVERY CLASS.**

Though we want to be good teachers and be sensitive to our students, having a difficult student in class is confusing and frustrating for us. We want to give our student the best education that we can, but we do not want to condone misbehavior and disruption. If you find yourself in this situation now or in the future, take heart. Here are some tips for handling difficult students that will help you teach better and enable them learn better at the same time.

## 1 IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Though it may be a tough thing to hear, the first step is to remember it is not about you. As a teacher, you are there to educate, guide and help your students. You are not there to have a captive audience hanging on your every word. We teachers sometimes have to shift our focus and remember why we started teaching in the first place. It is so easy to be caught up in our natural patterns as a teacher, especially when they have been effective up until this point. Having difficult students reminds us that we, too, need challenges and changes in our teaching style. If you can germinate the attitude in yourself that you can always improve, always learn, always find some way to be a better teacher,

teaching a challenging student becomes an opportunity rather than a chore. Use the situation to your advantage to refine and deepen your craft as a teacher. All of your students, both current and future, will benefit from it.

## 2 TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

Ann, a special education teacher, gives this advice when dealing with a difficult student. "Read your students." What she means is to pay attention to facial expression and body language as you teach. Challenge yourself to spend more time facing your students than you do the white board. Look at them and notice the difficulty coming before it hits you and your classroom in full force. As you do this, pay attention to why the misbehavior is beginning. Sometimes students are not challenged. They may be a quick learner and find themselves bored before the lesson is over. They may be a struggling student who has not understood previous lessons and is giving up on this one as well. There may be a learning disability coming into play. If you suspect this, talk to an expert on the signs of and solutions for different learning disabilities. Another reason they may be acting up is because of a cultural issue of which you may not be aware. All of these situations and more can make class hard to handle for both you and your student. Take heart, teacher. There are things you can do to make things easier on you both.

## 3 CHANGE IT UP

Group work can be the most effective way of engaging under and over performing students. Pair your most advanced students with those who are struggling. In this, your advanced student will become more of a teacher, challenging her to explain and learn the material better. Your struggling student gets individual attention and, perhaps, a different explanation of the concept being taught. Sometimes, too, a student with the same native language as the one who is challenging may be able to explain something in way in which it is easier for the challenging student to understand. Though you are the teacher, you do not have to make all the learn-

ing happen solely by your hand. Use the resources you have in other students to reach the ones you are having difficulty reaching.

You can also change things up by breaking out of your curriculum when necessary to challenge students who are beyond what today's schedule says to teach. There is nothing wrong with assigning special projects to advanced students or letting them work at their own pace even if it is beyond where the class is. When a student is not challenged in class, it is not uncommon for that student to exhibit behavioral problems. A student who is challenged, on the other hand, will be more cooperative and tolerant when the class is studying something he understood long before that time.

Getting physical is another great way to help students who have difficulty sitting and paying attention to a whole lesson. When a student starts fidgeting, it is time to get your students up and moving. If you can, relate some physical action to whatever you are teaching. Use Simon Says to teach the grammar of commands. Have a student follow your instructions and move about the room. Do partnering activities where students must move their desks or walk to another area of the room. Anything you can do to engage the body with the mind will help these students be more attentive and absorbent to what you are teaching. Even if you cannot relate something physical to what you are teaching, take a seventh inning stretch to make the final part of the lesson more accessible.

**THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO HELP ENGAGE STUDENTS WHO MAY HAVE BEHAVIOR ISSUES. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS NOT TO TAKE IT PERSONALLY.**

Students do not refuse to engage because they do not want to learn. If you can find the underlying issue behind the disruptive behavior, you can tailor your lessons or assignments to best meet your students' needs. As a teacher, you do not always have to do things by the book. In fact, the best teachers are often the ones who do not.

# 4 Types of Problem Students and Strategies to Manage Them

## AS WITH ANY CLASSROOM SETTING YOU MAY ENCOUNTER PROBLEM STUDENTS IN ESL CLASSES.

Problem students are challenging because they may disrupt the learning environment, make your job more difficult than it has to be or just plain frustrate you and the other students. We've outlined four types of problem students and provided several strategies to deal with them. You will be able to spot these personality types from a mile away!

## THE FOUR TYPES OF PROBLEM STUDENTS

It's pretty easy to identify the prospective problem student from the get-go. Always go with your gut and diagnose the issue as early on as you can. That is half the battle. The sooner you recognize the problem student the sooner you can begin working on your strategies to alleviate the issue and get the student on track.

### 1 THE KNOW-IT-ALL

Some students are overzealous, rambunctious, loud talkers or just plain annoying. This is usually the student who may be above his classmates in speaking ability, but not necessarily in overall language skills. They tend to display helpful nature, but may chronically interrupt, talk way too much or for too long, and in extreme cases may try to challenge you in front of the class. The best way to deal with this type of student is to provide appropriate times where he or she can be the leader, but set very firm boundaries. You need to make it clear to them that you are facilitator which basically means you are running the show. They can have their forum occasionally and often have a lot of good ideas and questions to contribute. You don't want to shut them down completely. I've found that if you can disengage them in the class when they are getting off topic or stealing the spotlight, they generally get the hint. Other times it may take a private conversation. That conversation needs to be treated delicately as this type of student usually gets a bruised ego pretty easily.

Give them guidelines for how long they are allowed to have the floor, and show them each and every time that you are the decision-maker in the class.

### 2 THE PAINFULLY SHY

If anyone has worked in Asia or has Asian students, we have all encountered this student. They are usually female, afraid to speak, won't make eye contact, and generally want someone to translate for them. This is a delicate situation and it takes some grace and humor to reach them and pull them out of their shell. Give them time and take baby steps. If everyone is asking and answering questions, expect that they will do almost nothing until they reach a certain comfort level. Don't pressure them too much, but try to get them to at least repeat after you and praise anything that they do contribute. The other trick to this personality is to use her classmates to break through. They will instinctively try to help, so let them. Students like this are more apt to start sharing with someone from their own country or someone very similar to themselves. Put her in pairs with someone who will be gentle, and chances are that student will reach her. You can also try to approach something that will get a reaction out of the student. Maybe she really likes to eat sweets. Try a little bribery. Or maybe she is very close to her family, so the lesson on family may get her to respond. Keep trying and don't give up. Persistence is key with this one, and the student will eventually come around.

### 3 MR. INAPPROPRIATE

I've encountered this guy way too many times for my taste. This is the guy who is taking an English class to try to get a date either with other students or with the teacher. It is usually a man, but some women can also be inappropriately flirtatious in the class as well. First do not engage this behavior. A few times you may be able to laugh it off, but with this type of problem student, you are going to have to tell them what is appropriate (and not) for the classroom. You may have to disengage the

behavior a few times publicly, and then take him or her aside and give them the boundaries talk. In some cases the student doesn't realize why their actions are inappropriate. One tactic may be to teach a lesson on body language, pick-up lines, or relationships. That way are able to approach the sensitive topics as a group and get some dialogue happening.

### 4 THE REFUSER

The refuser is different from the painfully shy. The refuser never wants to participate and feels that they don't have to do the same level of work as everyone else. Often they don't do their homework, will clam up during activities, and also may challenge you in front of the class because they are unprepared. This type of student can be really frustrating as you start wondering why they are in the class in the first place. One way to reach them may be soft public humiliation, meaning that you put him or her on the spot when they should be prepared and see what happens. With younger learners just being called out and not being ready is often enough for them to start applying themselves. You can also apply some discipline. Give the student double the amount of homework and follow through. Ask them if they need extra help and pair them with a student who can be a good role model. You can also try and set goals for this student. For every three days in a row that you participate you get 5 minutes extra of break time. The incentive should be small but meaningful and should also be applied to the whole class not just the problem student.

## GENERALLY THE ESL CLASSROOM IS A JOY TO TEACH IN BECAUSE STUDENTS HAVE A REAL NEED AND DESIRE TO BE THERE.

Occasionally though, you may come across one of these problem students. Always be sure to keep your cool, apply patience instead of pressure and realize that you have the facilities to solve student issues.

# 7 Most Common Behavior Problems and How to Deal with Them

## ESL STUDENTS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES.

They come into your classroom with varying degrees of motivation and even different skill levels. Most are well-behaved. And some are terribly ill-behaved. As an ESL teacher, you can handle students that are less motivated than most, even those that need a little extra help from you to get that particular task done. But we all know that handling unacceptable behavior is hard and can take its toll if it is something you have to deal with on a daily basis.

The way we handle the day-to-day problems will determine whether the same problems will keep cropping up. So here are the most common behavior problems in the ESL class and how you can effectively nip them in the bud.

## UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR: 7 PROBLEMS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM

### 1 STUDENTS ARE RESTLESS/ GET OUT OF SEAT

EXAMPLE: You're having an animated discussion about ways to help the environment and a student gets up to look out the window.

Always give clear instructions, and make sure everyone understands and is engaged in the task. As soon as a student gets up to do something completely unrelated, walk over to the child, gently take their hand and walk them back to their seat – without interrupting the lesson. If this behavior continues, talk to them about the importance of paying attention, participating in the activity at hand and controlling the urge to do something else.

### 2 PLAYING WITH TOYS DURING CLASS

EXAMPLE: Students are quietly completing a worksheet about parts of the body when you see a student playing with a doll.

Gently take the toy, and place it on your desk or a shelf. Tell the child that they can share it with the others during the break. Make it a habit of encourag-

ing them to bring toys related to something you're talking about in class (like animals). If there are certain things they are allowed to bring, they might not feel tempted to bring other toys.

### 3 NAME CALLING

EXAMPLE: You're playing Bingo when you hear a student call a redheaded child "Carrot Top".

Stop what you're doing and have the child that has called out the offending name tell the class what the other student's name actually is. Discuss with the class the importance of treating each other with respect and kindness and why name calling is unacceptable in your classroom and everywhere else, for that matter.

### 4 TEASING / FIGHTING / BICKERING

EXAMPLE: You have two students who can't say two words to each other without starting a fight. Class began five minutes ago, and they're already at each other's throats.

Make sure the students who don't get along are sitting as far apart as possible. Discuss with the class the importance of ignoring teasing remarks. Talk about how arguing all the time is tiresome, and we should accept differences in points of view. On the other hand, stress the importance of being considerate towards each other and listening to what the other has to say.

### 5 THROWING THINGS

EXAMPLE: You're writing something on the whiteboard and a pencil flies across the room.

Tell the student that this kind of behavior is completely unacceptable. Go over the possible dangers of tossing objects around. Find out if they are doing what they're supposed to be doing and redirect their efforts to the task at hand.

### 6 YELLING/SHOUTING OUT ANSWERS

EXAMPLE: You ask Tom a question, and Lucy yells out the answer.

Tell the student that they're not being

courteous – they did not give the other student a chance to answer. Remind students they should raise their hands if they want to speak. On the other hand, remind them that it is not necessary to yell – if they wait their turn to speak, you will hear them perfectly.

### 7 HAVING PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS

EXAMPLE: You're asking students comprehension questions about a text they've just read, and you see three students in the back of the class holding a conversation.

Ask the students if they are talking about the task at hand. Ask them to share their interesting conversation with the rest of the class, or tell them they can tell the others all about it during the break. Discuss why it is not appropriate to have conversations during class.

#### WHEN TO TALK TO PARENTS

As a good rule of thumb, I recommend contacting parents when a specific problem seems to be recurring (happens every day or several times a week). Depending on the gravity of the matter, you can either send a note or schedule a meeting. I'd save meetings for things that put the children's well-being at risk, for instance violent behavior, verbal abuse or bullying.

There's a line between being mischievous and being outright malicious, and we can tell the difference. You can deal with mischievous behavior in class – malicious behavior should be discussed with parents.

#### PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Most of these problems will be avoided if you set clear rules from the start. Work together to establish your rules based on how you all want to be treated. Discuss the importance of treating others with respect, as well as the fact there is a time and place for everything and that some things simply can't be done in class. Don't forget to establish what rewards they will receive for good behavior, as well as the consequences of inappropriate behavior. Don't yell, scream or shout. The best way to teach students to behave nicely is to lead by example.



# Entitled Behavior in Students, Its Source, and Addressing It

**ANYONE WHO HAD BEEN TEACHING FOR AWHILE HAS EXPERIENCED IT. ONE OF YOUR STUDENTS SHUFFLES UP TO YOUR DESK AND CLAIMS TO BE UNHAPPY WITH HIS GRADE.**

Often there is an excuse — sick uncle, dead grandmother, generic “family emergency.” That apparently behind him, however, he’s become uneasily aware of his grade. And since this wasn’t his fault, he wonders if he can do some kind of “make up” work. Often this is a weak student, but sometimes it’s also a strong student, who wants to see her “B” grade changed to an “A.” While you may sympathize with the student’s desire — after all, who wouldn’t want a higher grade than earned? — teachers should refuse these requests if for no other reason than fairness to the students who have been coming regularly. This is just one example of “entitled” student behavior that has become common in our culture.

**WHAT ARE SOME ENTITLED STUDENT BEHAVIORS AND THEIR SOURCES?**

## 1 TAKING TIME OFF; ALTERING THE SCHEDULE

This is a major one: students are notorious for coming late, leaving early, and not attending. More immature students in particular have trouble understanding that they must fit college into their lives, not expect the college to revolve around their lives. These attitudes probably stem from not understanding the nature of college work or adult life in general and in seeing the world revolving around their own individual needs.

## 2 MODIFICATION OF WORK SCHEDULE OR CONTENT

Similarly, besides the schedule, students sometimes expect the class work schedule, such as due dates of major papers and tests also be modified for their needs. They can also

sometimes expect modification of content that they find “boring” or non-essential to life in general.

## 3 EXPECTING/NEGOTIATING A HIGHER GRADE

Another common behavior that students demonstrate is to try to negotiate a higher grade, often citing their “hard work.” While of course effort matters, so does a certain level of skill and proficiency at the college level.

How then can one diplomatically address the student wanting to raise her grade without the student complaining to the dean (as can happen, especially with higher achieving students)? This can be done by addressing a few key issues with the student:

**Communication (or Lack Thereof):** It was the student’s responsibility to approach you when she first began to see her grade falling due to her family or health crisis or other concerns. Teachers cannot “read” every student’s individual needs and concerns — adults are expected to speak up for themselves.

**Fairness to the Other Students:** Other students in the class have been laboring away, often through difficult circumstances of their own. This difference in commitment should be reflected in grades.

**Effective Curriculum:** The curriculum and activities for most college classes, including ESL classes, has been designed with care and forethought as to the assignments and how they will build on each other, articulate with other classes, and ultimately benefit the student. Any “make up” work a teacher, however good, can design “on the fly” and that the student will undoubtedly complete in a rush will not be the same quality and ultimately will not benefit the student.

**SUGGESTIONS TO ADDRESS ENTITLED STUDENT BEHAVIOR**

Any time you reject someone’s proposal, no matter how wrongheaded, such as completing a bunch of “make up” work instead of the regular curriculum, a few reasonable solutions should be made to leave everyone at least partially satisfied. Here are a few:

## 1 COMPLETE KEY COMPONENTS IN CURRICULUM

Not only does this save you the headache of designing an alternate curriculum for the student and figuring out how to assess it, but it also assures that the student can really benefit as much as possible from the class, given her lack of involvement. Pick out a few key assignments that the students can reasonably complete in the remaining time, decide on the highest grade the student can earn for this modified curriculum—you may decide no higher than a “B” or “C,” for example. Don’t be too disappointed if the student, given her history, fails to complete the work at all. You are simply doing your best to help her: she has to participate in those efforts on her behalf.

## 2 TEAM UP WITH A CLASSMATE AND SHARE NOTES; JOIN A STUDY GROUP.

One of the reasons a student might fall into such a dilemma as not having completed most of the coursework by the end of the semester is that he might have no real idea of what it is to be a college student and the work habits that it requires. The difference between commitment and work habits needed for high school and college in the U.S. is notoriously large. Meeting regularly with a tutor or study group can implicitly model and explicitly teach the behaviors need to succeed at the college level.

## 3 PORTFOLIOS

In some classes, such as writing classes, a portfolio might be an appropriate means to alternate curricu-

lum and assessment. In the portfolio, the student keeps a selection of representative work over a period of time to demonstrate progress. This kind of assessment based on individual progress rather than outside standards can benefit some students.

## **4 ADVISE THE STUDENT APPROPRIATELY**

It's entirely possible that despite your best efforts, the "Johnny-Come-Lately" student will just not be able to produce adequate work by the end of the term, given the late involvement in the course. Be prepared to talk to the student about this and various alternatives: repeating the course the following semester or in the summer, taking it at a local community college, and so forth. There a number of ways a student can remedy a situation like this once he comes to terms with it.

## **5 TURN IT BACK ON THE STUDENT**

Another method is asking the student what grade he thinks he deserves or what he should study in the class. Often he'll find he can't really say and realizes that perhaps the teacher can make the best decisions.

**IT ISN'T EASY DEALING WITH THE STUDENT WHO SEES A CERTAIN GRADEPOINT AVERAGE AS HER BIRTHRIGHT. HOWEVER, BY ADVISING THE STUDENT APPROPRIATELY, OFFERING SUGGESTIONS, AND ACTIVELY LISTENING, STUDENT SATISFACTION AND ACHIEVEMENT CAN BE ACHIEVED.**

# Dealing with the Demanding or Cynical Student

**IF YOU HAVE TAUGHT FOR MUCH TIME AT ALL, YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED THIS TYPE OF STUDENT: SHE WILL COME IN, THROW HER BOOKS DOWN, AND SPRAWL IN HER DESK.**

She will sit just close enough to you for you to hear her muttered remarks to her peers. Perhaps she'll challenge you and the class directly: why does she even have to be in this class when it so contrary to her goals and needs and personhood? The exercises in class are pointless, as far as she is concerned. The odd thing is that you have done nothing to offend this student personally, as far as you know, although she acts almost as if you have. Of course you haven't -- you have just met the demanding and/or cynical student. There are a number of causes outside of the teacher that contribute to the behavior of this kind of student and different ways to address them.

## REASONS FOR THE BEHAVIOR OF THE DEMANDING/ CYNICAL STUDENT AND METHODS TO ADDRESS THEM

### 1 NOT INTRINSICALLY MOTIVATED

The demanding/cynical student is not intrinsically motivated, to say the least, to be in your class. Of course most students have varying degrees of motivation outside of the innate love of learning: they are there for the grade, the degree, sometimes by court order, etc. Most, however, recognize their own agency in the situation: rarely does anyone hold a gun to a student's head and tell him to register in a class. However, the demanding/cynical student behaves as if she does have a gun to her head, so much so that she feels resentment and a degree of victimization: some force outside of herself made her register for your class. Getting the student to accept her own agency in the situation — that she, ultimately, chose to come to class — may be a first step.

### 2 NOT SEEING THE VALUE OF THE CLASS

Many students are unable to make the connection of a specific class to long-range goals. That is indeed part of the nature of being a student or beginner in a field: not understanding enough of the field to see how one level progresses to another. Helping students then see this progression helps the student in a number of ways: they begin to value this first step and then also to develop understanding of the field and its breadth and depth.

### 3 NOT HAVING A PERSONAL OR PROFESSIONAL GOAL

Sometimes the problem with the demanding/cynical student is not having a real goal, or a realistic goal, to apply the class to. Therefore, the class seems like a waste of time — precious time she could be spending doing something else. Discussing with the student what brought her to class in the first place, and linking the class to that goal, might help, as does discussions with the class as a whole on their career aspirations and applications of the course.

## USE THESE WAYS TO ADDRESS THE DEMANDING OR CYNICAL STUDENT

### 1 SHOW YOUR CONCERN FOR THE STUDENT

One reason students can put up a defensive façade is feeling undervalued or underappreciated, their individuality not recognized. Therefore, show real concern for your student. "So why are you here? What do you hope to accomplish? What made you enroll in the class? What are your goals?" These questions should not be asked sarcastically but rather with genuine interest, as the more you show interest, the more students develop trust and the more you are able to serve them.

### 2 SHOW YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIELD

Students sometimes enter class with a real skepticism of the intelligence and competence of teachers — perhaps justifiably, having been exposed to more than one poor example. Talking to students about your background in the field, demonstrating your knowledge, not to show off — well, yes, maybe to show off, but with the ultimate good intent of demonstrating why you're there, why you were chosen to teach the class, and in fact you do have something to teach — helps build trust with students.

### 3 SHOW YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR FIELD

Discuss what your subject has done for you and your life: writing has opened doors for me, for example, not only in employment — employers actually need people who can write — but also personally: I have written, effectively, everything from love poems to bat mitzvah blessings to challenges to parking tickets to eulogies. I often begin a semester of developmental composition by asking who actually likes to write. Few raise their hands, but students usually visibly relax and actually laugh in some cases, realizing that no judgment is going to be passed on them for not liking it. And then this leads into a discussion of reasons to actually like writing and what it can do for you.

### 4 MAKE THE CONNECTIONS EXPLICIT TO THE STUDENT

From the general discussion of the value of writing, the teacher can then proceed to showing how writing will advance student goals. Talk about how the subject can be used outside of class, its real-life applications, whatever chance you get. This helps build student enthusiasm and motivation to learn.



## **5 DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRACTICE AND DIFFERENT AUTHENTIC ASSIGNMENTS**

One of the problems with schooling in general is that students, even very young ones, usually sense when an assignment is “inauthentic,” that is not a “real” part of the field and nothing you’d ever actually do in the “real world.” Why should I care about writing or want to come to writing class if it’s all about the five-paragraph, or seven-paragraph, essay? When am I ever going to need this in the real world? But if students practice love letters, or persuasive speeches, letters of complaint, acceptance speeches, letters to the editor, wedding toasts, email messages to fundraise—all tasks people do in “real life”—well, the question becomes, who wouldn’t want to become a better writer?

**ADDRESSING THE CYNICAL OR DEMANDING STUDENT GOES TO THE HEART OF TEACHING ITSELF: IT IS REALLY ABOUT HELPING STUDENTS FIND THEIR OWN GOALS AND SHOWING THE VALUE OF EDUCATION.** Once the teacher is able to communicate some of that, often the cynical façade crumbles, and an enthusiastic student emerges.

# But It is Clear: Dealing with the Defensive Student

*Almost every time I hand back student essays, there is at least one student who is stunned by her grade — most often, that it was a “B” or a “C” rather than the “A” that she felt she deserved.*

Often she’ll come up to me after class — or more recently, confront me during class — about how she felt she deserved the “A.” When I point out her need for transitions, the problems with verb tense and point of view switches, and so forth, she’ll usually dismiss that with an “uh-huh” and go on reiterating the claim that it is good work, perhaps the best she has ever produced, and that she’s always received “A’s” on her previous work. I can’t really argue these points, usually not knowing about her past record, so I’ll pull out the grading rubric and show her how her essay measures against the rubric. The student may here change the subject and give her opinion that her writing is certainly as good as the textbook model by essayist Joan Didion. I’ll then drag out the textbook and attempt to show her the difference between her own work and Didion’s: Didion’s precise word choice, the purposeful organization, etc. This usually only gets a blank look from the student and then the repeated claim she really deserved the “A” grade.

It’s probably somewhat clear to the reader what might be going on with this student. One of the problems we often face with students and teaching them a skill, such as writing, is that their very status as beginners can often impede their ability to distinguish between good and poor work. This shouldn’t be a surprise: it takes a certain skill level in a field to recognize what is good work and mediocre work within that field. As a non-tennis player, for example, I really wouldn’t be able to recognize the elements of a good serve and a poor one. And this problem is also evident in the student mentioned above: she lacked the insight into good writing even to tell me why she felt she deserved an “A” (her development, word choice, etc.) but simply that she wanted it. There are several concerns with defensive students, but fortunately, also methods to deal with them. These methods are designed to get the student beyond her

defensiveness and protection of her work and, by extension, her ego (“But it is excellent work!”) to recognizing there is room for improvement — in the work itself, not necessarily in herself as an individual— and to move forward in revising and improving her work.

## CONCERNS WITH DEFENSIVE STUDENTS AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

### 1 LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS GOOD WORK

Again, a major concern with defensive students is lack of even understanding the difference between good and mediocre efforts in a field they themselves are new to. One of the contributing factors to this problem is the tradition of teaching by unrealistically strong professional models: an essay by Joan Didion or Richard Rodriguez, for example, is so removed from most students’ abilities they are unable to even relate to it or aspire to write like that. More helpful, I’ve found, is to keep a bank of past student work, with names removed, of course, of both strong and weaker essays. I find that after a semester of analyzing these, students have a well-developed sense of what is good and poor writing. Students can then apply this understanding of what is good work to their own performance.

### 2 PAST POSITIVE FEEDBACK (IMAGINED OR REAL)

Another major problem that students face in the United States in particular is that they may have in the past received nothing but positive feedback for their work, so they have no sense that there is any room for improvement. Teachers tend to be a kind and encouraging group of people, so they may have focused solely on what was strong in their students’ work... in addition, there is a big gap, in the United States at least, in the expectations of college and students’ prior education. Therefore, students are often shocked when they find themselves getting “C’s” on papers when they have only earned “A’s” in the past. Methods of dealing with this are

again discussing the expectations of the field of study: college composition, this case. I find that opening this discussion with what students’ own opinions of what makes good writing is particularly valuable: their answers, drawn from reading, of vivid word choice, good description and examples, a strong main idea and examples, “flows well” (i.e., well-organized with clear transitions) are the very qualities on the rubric by which they will be judged. Students therefore often have an existing sense of what good work is in the field that just needs to be made explicit by discussion, referring to the grading rubric, and showing examples of stronger and weaker work.

### 3 INSECURITY AND TENDENCY TO PERSONALIZE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

A final large problem of dealing with the defensive student is their underlying insecurity and hence tendency to personalize criticism: e.g. the student may hear “Your essay needs some revision” as “You’re a poor writer and not very intelligent either.” This problem can in part be addressed by recognizing first the writing’s strong points and the student’s potential as a writer and that revising the essay will continue to improve both the writing and the student as a writer— therefore taking the focus of the discussion away from the student’s personhood and focusing on the writing itself and ways to improve it.

**DEALING WITH DEFENSIVE STUDENTS CAN BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE OF THE VERY NATURE OF DEFENSIVENESS AS A SERIES OF BARRIERS TO PROTECT THE STUDENT’S EGO, WHICH CAN BE DIFFICULT TO PENETRATE IN ORDER TO FOCUS ON THE WORK, NOT THE STUDENT AS AN INDIVIDUAL.**

However, by using several strategies in teaching the difference between strong and mediocre work, keeping the focus on the work itself rather than the student as a person, and addressing both the strengths of the student work as well as its areas for improvement, get past the defensiveness and allows focus to move to the work itself and how to improve it.

# Sorry to Bother You: Dealing with the Very Insecure Student

## RECENTLY THERE HAVE BEEN MORE TEACHER CONCERNS WITH STUDENTS WHO HAVE A SURFEIT OF SELF-ESTEEM RATHER THAN A LACK OF IT.

Teacher staff rooms are rife with tales of the demands and inflated view of their own abilities from entitled students. This may, however, be more of an American phenomenon: the United States, after all, has traditionally placed a high value on confidence and self-esteem. ESL students, however, often come from cultures that value modesty and respect of others over confidence and self-respect. In some ways, this comes as a welcome relief: the student who acknowledges the teacher might just know more than herself in the specific area of study. However, there are instances when the student is so self-effacing, insecure, and apparently lacking in self-worth that it is cause for concern for both the student's education and overall well-being. What are some of the signs of critical insecurity and what are the ways to address it if it is actually interfering with the student's ability to learn?

## SIGNS OF PROBLEMATIC INSECURITY IN STUDENTS

I say "problematic" because while many people may be insecure — in fact, most people, in specific situations — it is only a problem if it is to a degree that it is interfering with the student's ability to learn and function. Following are some of the signs that a student whose insecurity is problematic.

### 1 "HIDES OUT."

One of the major signs of a student with problems with self-esteem is that she "hides out" in the back of the class, where the teacher can't see her (or so she thinks), and where other students find it difficult to interact with her. She may also put up a "wall" of books or electronic devices,

such as laptops or cell phones, that prevent the teacher or other students from interacting with her. Excessive use of electronics in class is often regarded by instructors as simply rude, but often it is used a vehicle to avoid social intercourse — the student is so involved with the device or book that she is relieved of interacting with people face-to-face.

### 2 SELF-EFFACING TO A FAULT.

Another sign of a student struggling with self-esteem is that he is extremely apologetic for asking for anything; for example, apologizes repeatedly for "imposing" on a couple of moments of the instructor's time. In fact, the repeated use of the phrase "I'm sorry," often in inappropriate situations for which the individual should feel no responsibility or guilt, is a strong sign of an insecure individual anywhere.

### 3 DEVALUES OR DISMISSES LEGITIMATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

In some cultures — including in the United States, at least traditionally — it is expected to shrug off compliments or accomplishments, as bragging about them seems rude. Therefore, students who do this — "Oh, that's okay... I'm not really all that good a writer, but I try hard" — are often just engaging in an expected show of modesty. However, if a student repeatedly pushes asides compliments over every achievement, she may actually be struggling with feelings of self-worth, really seeing nothing remarkable in her abilities or actually seeing them as drawbacks.

### 4 EXCESSIVE FOCUS ON SUPPOSED FAULTS.

Just as a student who is truly insecure may dismiss his real accomplishments, he may also focus excessively on a set of real or imagined shortcomings that are often minor in nature: poor handwriting or organizational

skills, old clothes, lack of athletic ability, and so forth. Again, a student who makes a minor joke about a shortcoming: "Oh, I am such an airhead... I forget everything," may be just engaging in a show of conventional self-effacement, but if seems habitual, there may be more underlying concerns involved.

Again, all of these symptoms may indicate a lack of self-esteem. If they are extreme, they may actually be symptoms of underlying depression, and the teacher may consider referring the student to counseling services. Otherwise, if the insecurity seems mostly related to academic work, there are some ways the instructor can address it within the confines of the class. Since most students suffer from varying degrees of insecurity at different times, these methods are likely to benefit the entire class and need not be focused on a particular student.

## METHODS TO ADDRESS SELF-ESTEEM IN STUDENTS

The following methods can help the entire class improve their academic self-confidence, which in turn creates a comfort zone and ability to learn as the student is not longer so focused on her alleged shortcomings and is freed up to learn the course content.

### 1 SET UP A LEARNING COMMUNITY.

One of the best ways to improve self-esteem is to set up opportunities for successful interaction with others. Humans are by nature social creatures, hence our sense of self is heavily related to how well we integrate in a community. A sense of community can be achieved by setting up common goals for the class, such as completion of a major project related to English learning, and roles for each student toward that goal. The classes I remember most fondly are those that recognized my individual contribution



to the class.

## **2 RECOGNIZE THE STUDENT'S REAL EFFORTS AND PROGRESS.**

Recognizing the individual student's value to the group is another way to build self-esteem: it is extremely validating to have one's individual achievements acknowledged, such as how a student's graphic skills really contributed toward the class website. This recognizes both the student's individuality as well as the contribution to the group.

## **3 TEACH STUDENTS STUDY SKILLS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR OWN LEARNING.**

Finally, a major way to build student self-esteem within an academic setting is to teach such study skills as keeping a calendar of due dates, skimming text for efficient reading, outlining compositions, and distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources. Recognizing they are in control of their own learning, rather than dependent on the goodwill of the teacher, empowers students and builds their self-esteem.

### **IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM IN STUDENTS GOES BEYOND SIMPLY OFFERING VAGUE COMPLIMENTS BUT RATHER INVOLVES TEACHING STUDENTS CERTAIN THINKING HABITS, SUCH AS HOLDING REALISTIC VIEWS OF THEIR OWN STRENGTHS AND SHORTCOMINGS AND TAKING CHARGE THEIR OWN LEARNING.**

The results, however, in students who recognize their value as learners and as members of a community are gratifying.

# Deal with Eager Beavers: 5 Instant Solutions to Common Problems

**INDEPENDENT, AUTONOMOUS LEARNERS ARE A SIGHT TO BEHOLD. THEY SHOW UP FOR THEIR FIRST DAY OF CLASS ARMED WITH NOTEBOOKS, PENS, PENCILS AND HIGHLIGHTERS IN AN ASSORTMENT OF COLORS, AS WELL AS THE IRON WILL TO LEARN.**

They supply answers without being prompted. They complete all of their tasks and homework (and even ask for more!), and they dazzle you with a list of books they've read or movies they've watched in English... But we all know that not all students are like that. There are some, by contrast, who must be told exactly what to do – all the time. What happens when we have autonomous and dependent learners in the same classroom? This poses a series of challenges.

## **HOW TO DEAL WITH AUTONOMOUS & DEPENDENT LEARNERS: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

### **1 THE EAGER BEAVER READS AHEAD AND COMPLETES EXERCISES BEFORE CLASS**

There are students who are so keen on learning that they'll come to class having read the coursebook and underlined all of the new words (which they have carefully looked up in the dictionary). Some even go as far as completing the exercises and answering the questions!

**SOLUTION:** While it's great for students to want to come to class prepared, they should understand that there are things you must do together – in class and as a group. Tell them that you understand that they mean well, and that it's great that they are so motivated! But if they want something to do at home, you can give them similar exercises or suggest other books/materials they can work with in their free time. If they insist on "knowing" the answers before class, make sure they understand this gives them an unfair advantage over those who don't prepare.

### **2 THE EAGER BEAVER PROGRESSES FASTER**

This is a very common problem to encounter. An autonomous learner is more naturally motivated, does extra work, pays closer attention and will soon enough leave their classmates behind. On the other hand, the dependent learner probably already feels insecure, and the feeling of lagging behind will only make them less motivated. In time, the gap will be even wider.

**SOLUTION:** The ideal situation would be to detect those students with a natural penchant for language learning and place them in a higher level. If this is not possible, give the fast learner extra work that is suitable to their level, but not specifically related to the class curriculum, perhaps something connected to a hobby they enjoy or books they may be interested in. The dependent learner on the other hand must be engaged and motivated by all means possible. You'll find great ways to motivate teens, for example, in this article.

### **3 THE EAGER BEAVER ENGAGES IN BAD STUDY HABITS**

Some students use techniques/strategies that, while not altogether bad, are not precisely what you try to promote in class. A good example is when students read a text, underline each new word they come across, look it up in a bilingual dictionary and write down the translation for the word in their own native language. As most ESL teachers encourage students to think in English, bringing long lists of words they have already translated is counterproductive to this effort.

**SOLUTION:** Teach both autonomous and dependent learners different types of reading techniques and encourage them to use them at home. These techniques include scanning a text for answers, skimming to get the general idea, among others. Train them to focus on figuring out the meaning of the word from the context, but if they feel the need to look something up, encourage

the use of an English dictionary.

### **4 THE EAGER BEAVER BRINGS UP TOPICS THAT ARE IRRELEVANT TO THE CLASS**

Autonomous learners often ask questions about vocabulary or expressions they have come across in TV shows, movies or the Internet. This in itself poses a series of problems. Maybe not all students will be interested in the topic, TV show or subject matter – it may be highly specialized, scientific in nature, or quite simply, completely irrelevant to what you have been doing in class.

**SOLUTION:** Make sure students understand that you are willing to answer their questions and help them understand something, but there has to be a time and place for consultations that have nothing to do with class. You may set aside a specific moment for these questions, either before or after class, or give them your email. But do not stray too far from your lesson plan to discuss an irrelevant topic, as it may only alienate unmotivated students further.

### **5 ALL OF THE ABOVE INVOLVES LOTS OF EXTRA WORK FOR THE ESL TEACHER**

Finding extra material for either the eager beavers or dependent learners is an added burden to the ESL teachers who have enough on their plate. Most of us have our course planned with an established curriculum and do not anticipate these challenges.

**SOLUTION:** As in most cases, the best solution is to share the burden. Talk to other ESL teachers, particularly those who teach the same levels, and put together a list of recommended readings, extra-curricular study materials and books you may all suggest students buy for additional practice. This way, when you come across a student who wants or needs the extra work, all you have to do is consult your list and make the necessary recommendations.

# 5 Effective Ways to Calm Your Students Down

IT IS ALWAYS GREAT TO SEE YOUR STUDENTS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT LEARNING AND THE ACTIVITIES YOU SO CAREFULLY PREPARED FOR THEM BUT ONCE THEY HAVE GOTTEN ALL RILED UP, IT IS TIME TO BRING THEM BACK DOWN SO THAT YOU CAN SEND THEM TO THEIR PARENTS OR OTHER TEACHERS WITHOUT UPSETTING ANYONE.

Additionally if students are very loud and energetic at the very beginning of class, you will have to curb their excitement a little in order to complete the rest of the activities for your lesson.

Here are some strategies for dealing with students who are bouncing off the walls of your classroom.

## HOW TO CALM YOUR ESL STUDENTS DOWN

### 1 SIT DOWN

Students who are seated are more restrained and subdued. If students are running around the classroom or having a heated discussion, ask everyone to go back to their desks and sit down. The physical state of sitting in their chairs will help them relax. Standing is a great stance for action while sitting is more a state of rest. Some students may fidget at their desks but sitting is already a big improvement and this is less likely to distract other students. Once learners have taken their seats, shift their focus immediately to an activity so that they do not become bored or lose interest in the lesson. It is important for students to focus their energy on learning English so help them put it to good use by effectively managing your classroom.

### 2 EXERCISE

An activity requiring lots of energy that will tire students out could make them a little more calm during the rest of your lesson. If your young learners cannot sit still at the beginning of class, give them the chance

to use that energy during the warm up and then continue with your lesson. Some simple TPR games like Head and Shoulders or Simon Says would be perfect for reviewing body parts, writing relays would be good for slightly older students and even just simple exercises like jumping jacks or running in place should help learners settle down. For some students these types of exercises will actually energize them more so experiment to see what works best with your classes. Different groups of students may require different tactics.

### 3 QUIET TIME

Active exercises can be a lot of fun, especially with young learners, but after students have gotten out of their seats and moved around a bit, bring their heart rates down with a quiet activity such as reading or writing. Students can take their time silently reading through an article or begin writing their individual answers to short answer or essay questions before you turn these activities into class activities to check pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar points. These types of activities are good for calming a class down but should be avoided if students lack energy as you risk them falling asleep.

### 4 FOCUS

Get students to really focus by conducting an activity such as a circle exercise or something similar that is fast paced. This will take advantage of their energy but because they never know whose turn it will be next, they have to be quiet and pay attention in order to perform their part well. Another game that is exciting but requires that students remain calm and quiet is Chinese Whispers where students work in teams to see who can correctly pass a sentence from team member to team member the fastest.

### 5 TOPICS

A topic that interests your students will also make them more atten-

tive. Keep your learners in mind when deciding what to talk about in class. Students who are focused will not have the inclination to move around a lot nor will they be easily distracted. These are both likely to happen if students are overly excited or energized. If you are not sure what your students are interested in, simply ask them or take a poll of various topics to see what they are most eager to learn about.

AS YOU CAN SEE THESE APPROACHES ARE VERY DIFFERENT BUT THEY CAN ALL BE EFFECTIVE WHEN USED PROPERLY. THE METHOD YOU CHOOSE DEPENDS ON YOUR STUDENTS AND HOW THEY REACT TO ACTIVITIES.

Be sure to use the one that will be most efficient for the type of students you have in your classroom. Luckily this becomes less of a problem as students get older and in adult classes you will rarely have similar issues. If you struggle with this, change your approach to classes in order to resolve it and look on the bright side, at least no one is sleeping.