# **Classroom Routines Guide**

Proven classroom routines that save time, reduce stress, and create a calm learning environment.

MANAGEMENT

# **Classroom Routines Guide**

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"Routines aren't about control—they're about **freedom**."

When procedures run smoothly, you and your students are free to focus on learning.

### The Science of Classroom Routines

### Why Routines Matter

### For Students:

- Reduce cognitive load (brain power saved for learning)
- Increase sense of safety and predictability
- Build independence and responsibility

• Create equity (everyone knows expectations)

#### For Teachers:

- Save time on transitions and management
- Reduce decision fatigue
- Prevent behavioral issues before they start
- Create consistent learning environment

#### Routine vs. Procedure

- Routine: Automatic behavior (students do without prompting)
- Procedure: Step-by-step process being learned

Goal: Transform procedures into routines through consistent practice

## Foundation Routines (Week 1-2)

### **Morning Entry Routine**

The Challenge: Students enter chaotically, day starts with confusion

#### The Routine:

- 1. Silent entry (first 5 minutes)
- 2. **Unpack systematically** (backpack → homework → supplies)
- 3. Check morning message (on board or screen)
- 4. Begin bell work (review or preview activity)
- 5. Teacher circulates (greets students, checks homework)

#### **Teaching Tips:**

- Practice for 3-5 days explicitly
- Use timer and gentle reminders
- Celebrate successful mornings
- Address problems privately, not publicly

### Sample Morning Message:

Good morning, Room 12!
Today is Tuesday, October 15th
We'll explore fractions in math
Remember: Science project due Friday
Please complete problems 1-5 in your math journal

### **Attention Signal**

The Challenge: Getting 25+ students quiet quickly

### **Options That Work:**

#### **CLAP PATTERN**

- Teacher claps rhythm
- Students clap back and freeze
- Escalate complexity if needed

#### COUNTDOWN

- "5 finish your sentence"
- "4 eyes on me"
- "3 hands empty"
- "2 bodies still"
- "1 ready to learn"

#### **CALL AND RESPONSE**

- Teacher: "Criss-cross"
- Students: "Apple sauce" (and sit properly)

### Implementation:

- Choose ONE method, stick with it
- · Practice when students aren't excited
- Wait for 100% compliance before continuing
- Thank students for quick response

#### **Dismissal Routine**

The Challenge: Ending class calmly and organized

### The Routine:

- 1. Two-minute warning (finish current task)
- 2. Pack up procedure (books first, then supplies)
- 3. Chair placement (push in or stack)
- 4. Ready position (hands folded, eyes forward)
- 5. Dismiss by rows/groups (not all at once)

### **Key Points:**

- Never dismiss during chaos
- Students earn dismissal through calm behavior
- Pack up time is silent or very quiet
- Release students only when ready

## **Instructional Routines (Week 3-4)**

#### **Transition Between Activities**

The Magic Window: Most disruptions happen during transitions

### The 3-Step Transition:

- 1. Close current activity (clear instruction about stopping)
- 2. Prepare for next (get materials, move if needed)
- 3. Open new activity (clear instruction about starting)

#### **Verbal Routine:**

- "In 30 seconds, we'll transition to math"
- "Please finish your sentence and close your books"
- "Get your math journal and pencil ready"
- "When I say go, we'll begin problem #1"

#### **Non-Verbal Signals:**

- Lights off/on = attention needed
- Hand raised = students raise hands too
- Point to schedule = reference what's next

### **Group Work Setup**

The Challenge: Group work becomes chaos without clear procedures

#### **Before Groups Form:**

- 1. **Explain the task** clearly (what, how long, expected outcome)
- 2. **Assign roles** (facilitator, recorder, timekeeper, materials manager)
- 3. **Set volume level** (whisper, partner voice, or presentation voice)
- 4. Share signal for regrouping (music stops, lights flash)

### **Group Formation Strategies:**

• Clock partners: Each student has 12 partners (one for each hour)

- Playing cards: Same number = group, same suit = pair
- Puzzle pieces: Pieces that fit together form groups
- Teacher choice: Based on learning needs and social dynamics

### **Independent Work Routine**

The Goal: Students work productively without constant teacher direction

### The Setup:

- 1. Clear expectations (what to do when finished, noise level)
- 2. Help protocol (ask 3 before me, use help sign)
- 3. Materials available (pencils, paper, references)
- 4. Timer visible (shows how much time remains)

### Help Hierarchy:

- 1. Reread directions
- 2. Ask table partner
- 3. Check class resources (word wall, reference sheets)
- 4. Raise help signal (colored cup, hand signal)

### Reading/Silent Work

The Expectation: True independent engagement

### Components:

- Book selection ready (each student has appropriate book)
- Reading spot established (desk, carpet area, reading corner)
- Silent signal (no talking, no movement except page turning)
- Time boundaries clear (15 minutes, until timer rings)

### **Early Finisher Options:**

- Read another book
- Write in reading journal
- · Complete silent extension activity
- Review previous assignments

# Management Routines (Week 5-6)

#### **Bathroom and Water Breaks**

The System: Minimize disruption while meeting student needs

### **Hand Signal Method:**

- 1 finger = bathroom (urgent)
- 2 fingers = water fountain
- Teacher nods = yes, head shake = wait

#### Pass System:

- Only 1 student out at a time
- Take hall pass
- Return within 5 minutes
- No breaks during direct instruction

#### **Scheduled Breaks:**

- Primary: Every 45-60 minutes
- Secondary: Between class periods
- Emergency protocol for urgent needs

### **Supply Management**

The Goal: Students get what they need without disrupting learning

#### **Pencil Protocol:**

- Pencil cups at each table
- Broken pencil → trade for working pencil
- · Sharpening only at designated times
- Personal pencils stay in desk/backpack

#### **Materials Distribution:**

- Materials manager role for each table
- Color-coded bins for different supplies
- "Take what you need" guideline (not grab everything)
- Clean-up signal to return materials

#### **Turn-In Procedures**

The Challenge: Collecting work efficiently without losing papers

### **Collection Systems:**

• Subject bins labeled clearly (Math, Science, etc.)

- Table captains collect and submit
- Color-coded trays for different assignments
- Digital submission when possible

#### Homework Turn-In:

- 1. Students place in designated bin during morning routine
- 2. Homework monitor checks for completion
- 3. Missing assignments logged immediately
- 4. Late work has separate location

### **Technology Routines**

#### **Device Distribution:**

- 1. Row leaders collect devices
- 2. Handle with care reminder each time
- 3. Login immediately when device is received
- 4. Hands off keyboard until instruction given

### **Usage Expectations:**

- Screens down when teacher talking
- One tab/app open at a time
- Help neighbors before calling teacher
- Save work frequently

#### **End of Session:**

- 1. Save and close all work
- 2. Logout completely
- 3. Clean screen if needed
- 4. Return to charging station

# Advanced Routines (Week 7-8)

#### **Substitute Teacher Routine**

The Plan: Your class runs smoothly even when you're away

#### Student Jobs:

• Class manager: Explains routines to substitute

- Schedule keeper: Tracks timing of activities
- Materials helper: Knows where everything is
- Technology assistant: Handles device issues

#### **Substitute Folder Contents:**

- Class schedule with times
- Student seating chart with helpful notes
- Emergency procedures and contacts
- Behavior management tips specific to your class
- List of reliable student helpers

#### **Assessment Routines**

### **Test-Taking Procedures:**

- 1. Clear desk completely except allowed materials
- 2. Name and date on paper first
- 3. Read all directions before beginning
- 4. Raise hand for questions (no talking)
- 5. Eyes on own paper always

### **Finished Early Protocol:**

- Review answers quietly
- Read independently
- Complete quiet extension work
- No movement until everyone finishes

### **Emergency Routines**

### Fire Drill:

- 1. Stop immediately (leave everything)
- 2. Form line at door quickly and quietly
- 3. Follow designated route (posted by door)
- 4. Stay with class outside
- 5. Wait for all-clear signal

#### **Lockdown Procedure:**

- 1. Lights off immediately
- 2. Move away from windows/door

- 3. Silent and still until all-clear
- 4. Follow teacher directions exactly

# **Building Routine Success**

### Teaching Phase (Days 1-10)

### **Explicit Instruction:**

- 1. Model the routine step by step
- 2. Practice with students (guided practice)
- 3. Explain the "why" behind each step
- 4. Anticipate problems and address them

### **Daily Reinforcement:**

- Practice routines even when unnecessary
- Celebrate successful completion
- Reteach immediately when needed
- Stay consistent with expectations

### Maintenance Phase (Ongoing)

#### **Gentle Reminders:**

- "Remember our transition routine"
- "Let's practice that again"
- "Who can remind us of step 3?"

#### **Positive Reinforcement:**

- "I noticed everyone followed our dismissal routine perfectly"
- "Table 4 is ready—great job with materials"
- "Thank you for using our quiet signal"

#### Periodic Review:

- · Weekly routine check-ins
- · Student feedback on what's working
- Adjust routines that aren't serving their purpose
- Add new routines only when current ones are solid

### **Troubleshooting Common Issues**

### Students "forget" routines:

- Practice more frequently
- Post visual reminders
- Use peer helpers
- Break routine into smaller steps

### Routines take too long:

- Simplify steps
- Remove unnecessary components
- Practice during calm times
- Set reasonable time expectations

#### Some students resist routines:

- Involve resistant students in leadership roles
- Explain benefits more clearly
- Check if routine actually makes sense
- Consider individual modifications

# **Age-Specific Adaptations**

### **Primary Grades (K-2)**

### **Modifications:**

- Use more visual cues and songs
- Practice routines multiple times daily
- Keep steps simple (3-4 maximum)
- Build in movement and brain breaks

### **Example Transitions:**

- Sing cleanup song while tidying
- Use hand signals for bathroom needs
- March or tiptoe to carpet area
- Count down from 10 for attention

### Elementary (Grades 3-5)

#### **Enhancements:**

- Students can help create classroom routines
- Assign student jobs and rotate weekly
- Use timers for transition challenges
- Incorporate student choice when possible

### **Leadership Opportunities:**

- Line leader, door holder, materials manager
- Technology helper, substitute assistant
- Peer tutors during independent work

### Secondary (Grades 6-12)

### **Expectations:**

- Routines should be efficient and respectful
- Students take more ownership
- · Less teacher direction, more student responsibility
- Focus on time management and preparation

#### **Advanced Procedures:**

- Digital assignment submission
- Independent research protocols
- Collaborative project management
- Self-assessment and reflection routines

# **Monthly Routine Review**

### What's Working Well?

Which routines run smoothly without reminders?
What positive changes have you noticed in classroom climate?
☐ Which routines save the most time?

### What Needs Adjustment?

	☐ Which routines require frequent reteaching?
	☐ What barriers prevent smooth implementation?
•	☐ Which routines actually create more work?

### Student Feedback

•	Ask students which routines help them learn best		
•	Get input on timing and procedures		
•	Include student voice in routine modifications		
Planning Ahead			
•	What new routines might help?		
•	Which current routines can be refined?		
•	How can students take more ownership?		

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