

## 5 Classroom Management Tips To Silence A Noisy Class

By Rob Johnson

1. The first thing to remember is that you are the boss. Self belief is incredibly important in this job. You can't expect pupils to respond positively to you unless you believe, really believe, that you fully deserve their respect and compliance. The thought that you are the leader in the classroom must be at the forefront of your mind. If you give any sign at all that you are NOT in FULL CONTROL, children will sense this and exploit your weaknesses. You MUST project strength and the impression that you will not tolerate any disobedience. All too often a teacher will enter a lesson filled with dread and give out the signal that they are beaten before the lesson even starts. Pupils sense this. If you've been having a hard time with a particular group they will come to expect that you will be a walk-over and get into the habit of talking freely with total disregard for your threats.
2. Have definite rules on noise Once you've decided on your rules (preferably with input from the pupils) you need to ensure the pupils are totally clear what those rules are. There must be no ambiguity and therefore no room for argument. We all know how important consistency is in terms of classroom management but unless you have a clear set of rules to work to in the first place, you can't consistently apply them. So, what is your rule on noise? Mine is simple: If I say there is to be no talking, then there is to be no talking. I will not tolerate being interrupted without taking action. I seldom enforce this rule for longer than a few minutes – just at those key times when I am either explaining something, starting a new task or taking a register etc. - but if I tell a group that I want total silence, then I mean it. And any pupil who ignores this is dealt with straight away. For example, never let a pupil shout out without reminding them to put up their hand. Never, allow pupils to continue talking at the start of a lesson when you've started explaining the objective. Never, let pupils interrupt you without reminding them that it is unacceptable to do so. If you let them get away with it once, you have effectively trained them to try and get away with it again.
3. Control entry to the classroom The ideal place to establish control over your pupils is outside the door - before you even let them in the room. You must start the lesson under your terms. And the lesson starts before they enter the room with you having them line up outside the door in an orderly manner. This is the perfect time to gauge the mood of the group and indeed the individuals in the group. You can easily spot potential problems (unhappy pupils, cases of bullying, arguments etc.) and deal with them rather than letting them go unnoticed and having them escalate into serious disruptions during your lesson. If the group won't stand still and quiet don't let them in the room. They must do EXACTLY as you say before you let them through the door. If they run to a chair bring them back again and make them walk. If you let them get away with anything at this important stage, you will set the tone as being one where they can get away with things. You don't want that.
4. Have 'settling work' ready for them when they enter the room If you have a group who just won't settle try presenting them with some of the following 'settling work' as soon as they enter the room. But... make sure you add this little twist to ensure the pupils get stuck into it straight away... On your board have the following written up... "Complete the work detailed below. You have ten minutes. If you don't finish it, you will return at break to complete it." Obviously you need to adjust individual work targets for less able pupils to make it fair. Once they've started you can go round the slow workers very quietly, out of earshot of the others, and tell them where to stop. i.e. give them a work target which requires less writing than the others – "James, you can stop when you get to the end of this sentence". (And put a pencil mark where you want them to get up to.) The great advantage of this strategy is that it gives you a few minutes to get your resources sorted out. I do use this if I want to show a DVD clip and haven't had time to set the AV equipment up for example. On each desk you could have a quick topic-related puzzle, a review quiz of last lesson's work, a cloze exercise or some text copying work. Nothing too difficult – you don't want to confuse them because they'll spend ten minutes asking questions instead of settling down. Choose something simple (and preferably light-hearted or fun) that requires no explanation or fuss. As well as having the instructions written on the board, greet them at the door and say... "Get started on the simple task on your desk – you have ten minutes to finish it." Once they're in the room you can then add... "Anyone not finishing this little task will finish it at break – there should be no talking. If you talk you'll come back at break and do it in silence then." If you want them to copy notes from the board (or a book) make sure there isn't a huge amount of text otherwise you will provoke complaints. You can 'hide' extra work by having five or ten lines of text for them to copy and then a note at the end saying "Now answer question 2 on page 46" which could be another five or ten lines of notes. Comments like... "It is entirely your choice as to whether or not you get break. If you want break, do the work. If you don't want break, sit and chat." ...can be used if they don't settle straight away.
5. The Right Way To Ask For Silence You may have been told that an alternative to shouting for silence is to simply wait for rowdy pupils to calm down. And wait... And wait... And wait... Teachers have mixed views as to the effectiveness of waiting for silence before continuing with the lesson because in many cases it just doesn't work. Some classes will respond positively to this strategy almost straight away but a hard class will test your mettle and try to push you way beyond 5 or 10 minutes. They'll enjoy watching your expression turn to desperation and laugh at the fact that your plan isn't working. At a time like this you need to bring in sanctions and make them see that their continuous disobedience will not be tolerated. If you have a strong, commanding voice you can shout for quiet and explain what the sanctions will be if they continue talking. If you can't be sure that your voice will cut through the noise sufficiently, you can communicate via the board by writing your instructions. Write up your instructions in bold, capital letters. You may need to give them slightly longer time to comply – allowing for the fact that they may not all read your instructions straight away. This is what to say... (You may think that these sanctions won't work with your toughest class but they are phrased in a very specific manner as you'll soon see. If you rigorously and consistently apply them you will win. Your class will settle. I've never known it fail). "If you wish to continue talking during my lesson I will have to take time off you at break. By the time I've written the title on the board you need to be sitting in silence. Anyone who is still talking after that will be kept behind for 5 minutes." Phrasing your instructions in this way when you want a class to be quiet is very powerful and almost always guarantees success. Let's examine why: Firstly, you are

being very fair and giving the pupils a warning... "If you wish to continue talking during my lesson I will have to take time off you at break." When teachers try to issue a punishment without a warning... "Right you've just lost your break!" ...they are often met with a torrent of abuse... "No way, that's not fair – we weren't doing anything!!!" I always find that giving pupils a fair warning about an impending sanction takes the sting out of a confrontational situation. Secondly, you are telling them exactly what they are doing wrong, and exactly how to put it right... "...you need to be sitting in silence." Thirdly, you are giving them a clear time by which you expect full compliance... "By the time I've written the title on the board you need to be sitting in silence." Fourthly, and very importantly, you are telling them exactly what will happen to them if they don't do as you ask... "Anyone who is still talking after that will be kept behind for 5 minutes." These key features are important if you want pupils to follow your instructions because they leave no room for questions, debates, arguments or confusion. The pupils know exactly what they're doing wrong, what will happen if they continue and how to correct their behavior so as to evade a sanction. N.B. I'm fully aware that timetable constraints do not allow teachers to keep pupils back after each and every lesson. For that reason you need to think about the sanctions you will issue. You could for example hit the class hard and tell them that any pupils still talking will receive a letter home but it may be better to start off with a small sanction (such as staying behind after school for 5 minutes) because you can then add to it if and when the behavior continues.

## About the Author

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