

Waterford Academy of Education

Discipline in the EFL Classroom

This extract is taken from

<http://www.teflteachertraining.com/blog/discipline-in-the-efl-classroom/>

WAE finds it a useful general guideline for teachers.

Basic Concepts:

The best way to deal with discipline issues in the EFL classroom is to have a good lesson that is active and encourages the participation of every student in the room. An active student is not usually a problem student.

That said, many students are not in the EFL classroom because they want to be. Many are there because their school or university program requires it, their company/employer requires it, or their parents put them in the class. A few parents even use language schools as a babysitting service. So, sometimes, problems can be expected.

No matter what the problem, the best policy is to keep your cool. In fact, the best advice is to always act on a problem BEFORE you get upset, while you can still think rationally and calmly about solving it. Plan ahead for dealing with common problems.

Set clear rules and explain them to students the first day of class. Be serious about the rules, enforce them consistently, without showing any upset, and you are on your way.

Students who talk a lot, or misbehave in a mild manner, can often be quieted just by your presence if you stand next to them. Even quite disruptive teenagers can often be settled down with a simple gentle hand placed on their shoulder. You don't have to say anything, they get the message. Try not to take things too seriously, just enforce rules with a smile on your face so as to not upset the rest of the class.

Adults generally are not too problematic, though in some cultures they can be.

Children present a special challenge. Remember the old rule that the length of an activity for a child should be no longer than double their age minus two and some suggest age equals length of activity. Thus a four-year-old child at maximum can probably only tolerate an activity of six minutes or less then you should move on.

Children will often act out for your attention and it would be best to study some basic psychology and behavior modification techniques to keep a handle on them. Generally speaking, giving a child attention for unwanted behavior is not a good idea. It is far better to target the child right next to the misbehaving child and reward them for doing what you want the problem child to do (like sitting down, or working on the assigned task).

It is important to get some idea from your employer what rules they feel should be enforced and what they recommend you do about discipline problems. Language schools are typically private businesses and need you to deal with any problem gently, positively and in a way they doesn't chase their customers away. Ask the other teachers at a school what the school enforces and if they "back up" their teachers. Some don't and it is far better to know that BEFORE you have to press a point – and lose.

Know that what might be perceived as "cheating" in the Western world might be considered "helping your friends" in some other cultures. Here, prevention is the best action – spreading desks far apart and even all the way up to the front and back walls if need be – during examinations. Don't allow cheating, but don't get too stressed by it. It is a cultural issue more than anything else.

Discipline in the EFL classroom is no different than discipline in any other type of classroom with the simple exception that you have one more thing to frustrate your student and that is language.

Classroom Discipline and Management; ten tips

This set of 10 useful tips is taken from

<http://712educators.about.com/od/discipline/tp/disciplinetips.htm>

Classroom discipline and management causes the most fear and consternation in new teachers. However, classroom management is a skill that is not only learned but practiced daily. Here are ten tips that can lead to successful classroom management and discipline. These tips can help you cut down on discipline problems and leave you with fewer interruptions and disruptions.

1. It's Easier to Get Easier

Many teachers make the mistake of starting the school year with a poor discipline plan. Students quickly assess the situation in each class and realize what they will be allowed to get away with. Once you set a precedent of allowing a lot of disruptions, it can be very hard to start better classroom management and discipline techniques. However, it is never tough to get easier as the year goes on. While you don't have to follow the adage, "Never smile until Christmas," it does have its merits.

2. Fairness is the Key

Students have a distinct sense of what is and what is not fair. You must act fairly for all students if you expect to be respected. If you do not treat all students equitably, you will be labelled as unfair and students will not be keen to follow your rules. Make sure that if your best student does something wrong, they too get punished for it.

3. Deal with Disruptions with as Little Interruption as Possible

When you have classroom disruptions, it is imperative that you deal with them immediately and with as little interruption of your class momentum as possible. If students are talking amongst themselves and you are having a classroom discussion, ask one of them a question to try to get them back on track. If you have to stop the flow of your lesson to deal with disruptions, then you are robbing students who want to learn of their precious in-class time.

4. Avoid Confrontations in front of the students

Whenever there is a confrontation in class there is a winner and a loser. Obviously as the teacher, you need to keep order and discipline in your class. However, it is much better to deal with discipline issues privately than cause a student to 'lose face' in front of their friends. It is not a good idea to make an example out of a disciplinary issue. Even though other students might get the point, you might have lost any chance of actually teaching that student anything in your class.

5. Stop Disruptions with a little humour

Sometimes all it takes is for everyone to have a good laugh to get things back on track in a classroom. Many times, however, teachers confuse good humor with sarcasm. While humor can quickly diffuse a situation, sarcasm may harm your relationship with the students involved. Use your best judgment but realize that what some people think as funny others find to be offensive.

6. Keep High Expectations in your class.

Expect that your students will behave, not that they will disrupt. Reinforce this with the way you speak to your students. When you begin the day, tell your students your expectations. For example, you might say, "During this whole group session, I expect you to raise your hands and be recognized before you start speaking. I also expect you to respect each other's opinions and listen to what each person has to say."

7. Overplan

Free time is something teachers should avoid. By allowing students time just to talk each day, you are setting a precedent about how you view academics and your subject. To avoid this, overplan. When you have too much to cover, you'll never run out of lessons and you will avoid free time. You can also fill up any left over time with mini-lessons or revision

8. Be Consistent.

One of the worst things you can do as a teacher is to not enforce your rules consistently. If one day you ignore misbehaviors and the next day you jump on someone for the smallest infraction, your students will quickly lose respect for you. Your students have the right to expect you to basically be the same everyday. Moodiness is not allowed. Once you lose your student's respect, you also lose their attention and their desire to please you.

9. Make Rules Understandable

You need to be selective in your class rules (no one can follow 180 rules consistently). You also need to make them clear. Students should understand what is and what is not acceptable. Further, you should make sure that the consequences for breaking your rules are also clear and known beforehand.

10. Start Fresh Everyday

This tip does not mean that you discount all previous infractions, i.e. if they have three tardies then today means four. However, it does mean that you should start teaching your class each day with the expectation that students will behave. Don't assume that because Julie has disrupted your class everyday for a week, she will disrupt it today. By doing this, you will not be treating Julie any differently and thereby setting her up to disrupt again (like a self-fulfilling prophecy).

Suggested Classroom Rules

WAE strongly recommends that each teacher makes “agreeing the rules”, part of their classroom induction on Day 1. Try not to make them too complicated or they will not be remembered. The sample rules below may be helpful. They are taken from the website below and modified for WAE.

<http://712educators.about.com/cs/backtoschool/a/classrules.htm>

1. **Come to class on time.** Standing outside the door and rushing in when class starts is rude and inconsiderate to the teacher and the other students.
2. **Begin the warm up activity within one minute after the tardy bell.** Directions will be on the projection screen or the board. Please do not wait for me to remind you to begin since I need to take roll and attend to other duties for the first few minutes of the period. When I begin class, directions for the warm up may be taken down, so don't delay.
3. **Attend to personal needs before coming to class.** Constant coming and going disrupts the class for everyone. Please do not ask to leave unless you have a true emergency.
4. **Remain in your assigned seat** unless you have permission to get up. Throw scraps away at the end of the period on your way out.
5. **Do not eat candy or other food in class** unless you have been given special permission.
6. **Bring required materials every day** unless you are otherwise directed. This included your Student Book, pen and pencil, eraser, writing pad.
7. **Talk only when permitted.** Be aware of the situation since quiet talking is allowed in some situations and speaking to the entire group without raising your hand may be allowed in others. I will remind you once and expect compliance.
8. **Use polite speech and body language.** Unkind teasing and impolite behavior is unacceptable.
9. **Do not cheat.** Students caught cheating will be referred to the WAE Directors. Both the student who shares his work for an independent assignment AND the person who copies it will suffer the same consequences. I expect you to do your own work and to be sure no one can copy it.
10. **Follow the teacher's directions immediately.** Keep me happy and I'll do a better job for you!

What to do when problems arise.

1. Attendance Problems.

Attendance is mandatory for Junior Students. If a student does not attend or leaves your class, please inform the WAE Administrator as soon as possible. If you have a mobile telephone, please call from your classroom. The student may be ill or gone missing for some other reason.

2. Behavioural Problems

If you encounter serious or persistent behavioural problems, which threaten the welfare of others or disrupt your teaching, please report the student to the WAE Administrator.

The student will be interviewed, along with a Group leader, and appropriate action will be taken. These will range from withdrawal of privileges to sending home.