

# Basic Strategies for Providing Structure in the Classroom

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Being an effective teacher begins by providing structure in the classroom. Most students respond positively to structure, especially those who have little structure and stability in their home life. A structured classroom often translates to a safe classroom, one where students can enjoy themselves and focus on learning. In a structured learning environment, students are more likely to thrive and experience personal and academic growth.

Too often teachers provide students with freedoms that they can abuse. A lack of structure can destroy a learning environment and undermine a teacher's authority, leading to misbehavior and wasted time.

Keeping a classroom structured does take a strong commitment from the teacher, but the rewards are well worth the time, effort, and planning required. Teachers who build a structured classroom will find that they enjoy their jobs more, see more growth in their students, and experience more positivity. It all starts with a few simple steps.

## 1 of 7 | Start on Day One

It is essential to recognize that the first few days of the school year often dictate the tone for the remainder of the year. Once you lose a class, you rarely get them back. Structure starts on day one. Rules and expectations should be laid out immediately, and possible consequences should be discussed in depth. Provide students with specific scenarios and walk them through your expectations as well as your plan for dealing with issues in the classroom.



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## 2 of 7 | Set Expectations High



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As a teacher, you should naturally come in with high expectations for your students. Convey your expectations to them but set goals that are realistic and reachable. These goals should challenge your students both individually and as a class. Have a set of expectations for everything including preparation, academic success, and student behaviour inside and outside your classroom.

## 3 of 7 | Hold Students Accountable

Hold every student accountable for their actions in all areas of life. Do not allow them to be mediocre. Encourage them to be great and do not let them settle for less than that. Deal with issues immediately. Do not allow students to get away with something simply because it is a small issue, as small issues can easily develop into more serious issues over time. Be fair but tough. Always listen to your students and take what they have to say to heart. Use their feedback to build the best classroom you can.



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## 4 of 7 | Keep It Simple



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Providing structure does not have to be difficult as you do not want to overwhelm your students. Pick a handful of the most fundamental rules and expectations as well as the most effective consequences. Spend a couple of minutes discussing or practicing them each day. Keep goal-setting simple. Do not give your students fifteen goals to meet at once. Provide them with a couple of reachable goals at a time and then add new ones once those are reached. Start the year off by providing goals that are easily attainable so that your students will build confidence through success. As the year moves along, provide them with goals that are increasingly more difficult to achieve.

Always set expectations high, but it is essential to understand that every class and every student is different. Be prepared to adjust your expectations if a student or group of students is not academically capable of meeting them. It is important that you are always realistic. By setting expectations too high, your risk making your students so frustrated that they just give up. Always temper your expectations to meet individual learning needs. Likewise, you will also encounter students who easily exceed your expectations. You should re-evaluate your approach in differentiating their instruction as well.

## 5 of 7 | Be Prepared to Adjust



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## 6 of 7 | Do Not Be Hypocritical



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Kids will identify a phony rather quickly. It is critical that you live by the same set of rules and expectations that you expect your students to follow. If you do not allow your students to have their cell phones in your classroom, then you should not either. You should be the primary role model for your students when it comes to structure. A key component with structure is preparation and organization. How can you expect your students to be prepared for class each day if you are rarely prepared yourself? Is your classroom clean and organized? Be real with your students and practice what you preach. Hold yourself to a higher level of accountability and students will follow your lead.

## 7 of 7 | Build a reputation

First-year teachers in particular often struggle with providing an adequate level of structure in their classrooms. This becomes easier with experience. After a few years, your reputation will either become a tremendous asset or a significant burden. Students will always talk about what they can or cannot get away with within a particular teacher's class. Veteran teachers who are structured find it increasingly easier over the years to continue to be structured because they have that reputation. Students come into their classrooms knowing what to expect, making the teachers' work much easier.



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