

INVOLVING STUDENTS IN CLASSROOM ROUTINES AND PROCESSES

Most EFL teachers would agree that establishing and maintaining classroom routines is essential to good classroom management. Classroom routines can increase student confidence and comfort levels since learners know what is expected of them in different situations. Set routines are especially helpful when working with young learners and teens that need extra support in regulating their behavior. Routines are usually established at the beginning of an academic year or term and are regularly reinforced.

Routines also encourage students to take responsibility for how their classroom functions. In other words, routines ensure both the teacher and the students are accountable for creating a class environment that runs smoothly and efficiently, thereby maximizing everyone's opportunities to learn. To equitably share responsibility for class routines, teachers can assign students long- or short-term classroom roles, or students may volunteer to take on certain jobs.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, you are encouraged to think about what you do to involve students in the routines and processes listed below. Take a few minutes to reflect: if you currently take on all of the responsibility for some of these routines and processes, how might you involve your students? Also, how might your students' age and maturity levels affect whether these roles are teacher-assigned or chosen by student volunteers? Don't forget: involving students in class routines helps them become more invested in the class community and saves time!

Can your students help with...? If so, how?

- **General administrative processes:** taking attendance, passing out and/or collecting papers and supplies, updating the class calendar or daily agenda
- **Learning activity processes:** leading discussions, recording notes during a group or whole-class activity or discussion, monitoring the noise level during group work, keeping track of participation levels during group work, keeping track of time allocated for an activity or phases of an activity, monitoring group progress towards longer-term project deadlines
- **Classroom maintenance:** cleaning up desks and the floor, cleaning off the board, maintaining bulletin boards (helping change out content), watering plants, opening and closing blinds or curtains when needed
- **Classroom equipment maintenance and operation:** making sure the pencil sharpener is emptied, turning the TV on and controlling the volume on the TV when it is used, turning off lights or computers at the end of the day, accounting for supplies that are borrowed or taken out of the classroom (e.g., from a lending library or supply cabinet); helping other students use computers or listening lab/audio equipment
- **Movement processes (often for younger students):** leading a line or lines of students from one place to another, holding the door when everyone leaves class, rearranging desks or chairs to support different types of interaction (pair work, group work, test taking, using a big open space for whole-class, movement-based activities)
- **Developing activity materials with teacher support:** creating charts, handouts, graphic organizers, game boards, or activity cards/prompts (Incorporating this routine into some activities can reduce the need to make photocopies/printouts and reduce teacher preparation time.)

IDEAS: PROMOTING STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY IN CLASS ROUTINES

1. Create a classroom jobs board

Make a chart that lists the classroom job, the associated responsibilities, the frequency with which the role needs to be carried out, and the name of the current student in the role. The first three items can be written directly on the chart, and student names can be put on cards or pieces of paper that can be moved around when jobs change. Be sure to leave extra space at the bottom of the chart to add new jobs suggested by students or additional jobs that you discover are necessary during the academic term. If desired, you can use the categories above to organize jobs in the chart by function. If working with young or lower-level students you can create a simplified chart that just lists the jobs and student names.

Post the chart in the classroom in a visible place. Consider assigning jobs or seeking out volunteers at regular intervals (weekly, biweekly, monthly). Also, assign a few students to the role of “alternate” or “substitute.” People with this job can be tasked to fill any role for absent students.

A partial jobs chart might look like this:

Job	Responsibility	Frequency	Student(s)
Plant waterer	Give all classroom plants one cup of water	1 time each week	Mario
Noise monitor	Let group mates know if they are talking too loudly	During all group work tasks with your regular group	Group 1 – Mohammed Group 2 – Katia Group 3 – Raquel
Lights monitor	Turn off all classroom lights	Daily at lunchtime and at the end of the day	Young-hee

2. Reinforcing student roles and routines

- **When needed, gently remind students of routines and roles in an age- and level-appropriate way.** For example, if students aren’t following the signal to return to their seats after a movement-based activity, you might say, “Some people have forgotten the signal for ‘return to your seats.’ Can anyone remind us what the signal is? Yes, it is when I hold up both hands like this (demonstrate the signal). If you see this signal, what should you do? (return to your seats) When should you do it? (right away) Also, point out the signal to your classmates if they haven’t seen it, please.”
- **If a student comes to you for assistance with a matter that has been assigned to another student, redirect them to the responsible classmate** (refer them to the jobs board if you use one). For example, if a student wants to return a lending library book to you before class, you might say, “Hmmm...Who is the current library monitor? Let’s check the jobs chart. It looks like Amadou will be happy help you return the book.” This approach can help build student confidence and create a sense of community as students seek assistance from each other.