

# MiddleWeb



All About the Middle Grades

## A MiddleWeb Classic

Reposted August 12, 2012

[www.middleweb.com](http://www.middleweb.com)

*Freshly edited & annotated!*

**Background:** In the early days of "social media," MiddleWeb supported a middle grades discussion group that grew to almost 700 members. The group conversed entirely via email through something called a list server (for you youngsters).

It worked like this: you sent an email to the list server email address and the server/computer sent that email to everybody on the participant list. If you replied, the computer sent your reply to everybody on the list. Sometimes it made for a LOT of email, so participants could choose to get a daily digest instead -- everything packed into a single, if somewhat lengthy, email packet.

It was quaint but effective, and folks who didn't mind long reads and busy inboxes loved it. Admittedly, that wasn't everybody. ☺ Here's one product of our MiddleWeb Listserv.

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## Day One and Beyond: A Week with Rick Wormeli

In 2003, in the last weeks before school began for another year, we staged a five-day listserv chat with our friend Rick Wormeli, to discuss his then newly-published book [Day One and Beyond: Practical Matters for New Middle-Level Teachers](#) (still in print and highly relevant today).

Rick has gone on to become a leading proponent of whole-child learning and a popular teaching consultant across in the USA. He says that *Day One* is still a favorite among his growing list of practice-oriented books. It's full of practical tips that new teachers rightfully see as "lifelines."

[Review of Day One and Meet Me in the Middle by teacher Elizabeth Stein](#)

[Chapter 1 of Day One can be read at the Stenhouse Publishers site](#)

(Click Table of Contents tab, then Preview)

This lightly edited transcript is based on five daily Digests from our listserv book chat, covering many matters great (pencil sharpening) and small (hmm). As you will see, in addition to great comments and advice from Rick many veteran teachers in our

MiddleWeb community pitched in with tips from their vast store of classroom experience. We've also added some "modern" links to related resources (including Rick's book text in Google Books!) The erratic margins are a remnant of the listserv experience.

## **JULY 28**

Topics of the day: *the digest was delivered with this summary of subject lines from the day's email.*

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 13:15:24 -0400  
From: John Norton  
Subject: Welcome to the One Day & Beyond chat

Welcome, teachers, new and veteran!

We've gathered here to discuss a book written specifically for new MS teachers and teachers new to the middle grades. Rick Wormeli is the justifiably proud author of "Day One and Beyond" and will be here with us to explore "practical matters for new middle level educators."

As veterans of our listserv know, Rick drew on our MiddleWeb Listserv discussions while preparing his book, and many names familiar to list members appear in his text. Rick has always been careful to credit ideas and insights he's gleaned from our discussion group. Another sign of his generous spirit.

This conversation will last for about five days, and it will work JUST LIKE our regular listserv chat. You get all the mail, and you respond as you have time.

We'll gather up the conversation and post it at the MiddleWeb site for future reference. So the questions asked and answered here this

week will be of service to many new teachers down the road.

IF YOU HAVE NOT HAD A CHANCE TO GET RICK'S BOOK...

[Find out more about Day One and Beyond here.](#)

*Note to readers: Rick Wormeli joins the conversation about midway through this first day.*

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 13:31:55 -0400  
From: John Norton  
Subject: Let's start our chat about Day One!

Rick and I have mulled over the best way to begin our conversation. Since we have a good representation of both new and veteran teachers, let's do it this way.

1. IF YOU'RE A NEW TEACHER (or new to the middle grades), feel free to ask any urgent question that's on your mind. OR, if you've read something in Rick's book that you'd like to hear more about, ask about that.

2. IF YOU'RE A VETERAN TEACHER, you might respond to something in the book -- something with which you agreed or disagreed, something you're curious about, or something that confused, surprised, or inspired you. (And Rick adds, "something you read in the book upon which you could improve.") You can also respond to any new teacher concerns that spark a thought.

John

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 11:01:52 -0700  
From: Joanne  
Subject: Classroom Rules

Rick,

How do you handle the whole bathroom pass issue? Do students quietly take the pass and go, do they ask you first, do they only get x number or "uses" of the pass per term? How do you "stop" the students who use the bathroom pass simply as an excuse to get out of the classroom?

For that matter, add the issues of pencil sharpening, getting a tissue, whatever. Do you discuss these things in the first days of class? What is the "rule"? Before the bell rings, after the discussion part is over and students are getting ready for desk work? I have some ideas, but would love to hear from an expert.

Thanks! Joanne

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 14:23:31 -0400  
From: CRW Pup  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I also am interested in hearing from more experienced educators (This will be my 2nd year in NY and 3rd overall, although my 1st year was so heinous I don't think I should count it!) on this point. I think it's demeaning to make another human being get my permission to use the restroom, and my policy has been that I hang the passes up on the bulletin board and when someone has to go, they unobtrusively get up, take the pass, and go, replacing the pass on their return.

This actually worked great until the last month and a half of the year, when some students started abusing the privilege. However, I didn't notice until other students pointed it out to me because by then, I'd gotten used to them being responsible (I know, silly me) about it. So I'm looking for ideas on how to amend my policy in a way that is still respectful of them as free human beings yet also doesn't promote abuse. Is it as simple as just paying more attention to who is using the pass and how often? Should I implement a sign-out sheet, as my mentor teacher did during my student teaching? That still seems too "prison-esque" for my tastes.

Pencil sharpening: I usually have let them just get up and sharpen pencils themselves and get their own tissues. Goodness knows I don't want to be a tissue-fetcher during cold season! I point out to them where I keep the tissue boxes and where the sharpeners are, and haven't had any problems with it.

Liz

(**Editor:** Another suggestion we heard recently: two big cups - one for sharp pencils, one for dull pencils. Take a sharp one, leave a dull one. Assign someone to sharpen batches of pencils as needed.)

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 13:32:33 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: T-chart idea

Rick,

I am a veteran teacher and find your book just as useful as a new teacher. I love the [T-chart idea](#) with the eye and ear to teach how to work in groups! It puts so much more ownership on the students when they come up with the ideas. I can't wait to use this. I also like [the assortment of seating arrangements you shared](#). I've used quite a few of these but I found some new ideas there as well. I know you don't advocate rows, but that is one thing that I still have to do the first couple of weeks just to get to know my

students. I think it's visually easier for me to remember. I'm still reading through the book and I know I'll find much more to comment on. Thanks very much for this informative book!

Paulette

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 14:42:47 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker  
Subject: Intro

Hi!

I am also a new teacher to the middle school--our district has changed our 4-5 self-contained building to a 5-6 middle school building. I have been teaching fifth grade for 2 years now and love it! One concern I have is that we may be encouraging the kids grow up more quickly because they are now part of a middle school model. I really like how [Rick delineated the difference between a junior high and middle school](#), especially since I had no idea there was a difference!

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 13:49:26 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I keep a box of tissues on both sides of the room. My students have to bring in 2 boxes at the beginning of the year according to their supply list. As far as sharpening pencils goes, I instruct my students to do this at the beginning of class or at a time when no direct instruction is going on.

Paulette

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 14:43:19 -0400  
From: Matt  
Subject: Classroom Rules

I guess I'm at the opposite end of the spectrum on this one. As a general rule, students do not leave my room during class. Obviously there are exceptions, but expecting them to come to class prepared and having attended to any bathroom needs between classes is certainly much easier to manage. In-class business (i.e. pencil sharpening, etc.) should be taken care of prior to the bell ringing. There's nothing worse than leading a class discussion with kids wandering all over.

The exception I do make is they are free to get tissues when necessary. It does sound strict, but I don't have any problems, and the kids adapt just fine. But whatever method(s) work best for you, make sure you are very diligent about them, especially the first several weeks of school. Ensure that your students know exactly what you expect from them, and you'll seldom have problems.

Matt

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 14:09:48 -0500  
From: Ellen Berg  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I'm not Rick ;-), but I'll be happy to share my pencil sharpener procedure with you. Students may sharpen their pencils:

1. If I'm not currently teaching/giving instructions;
2. If there is no other student at or moving toward the pencil sharpener;
3. If they're taking notes during lecture, the lead breaks and they raise their hands for permission.

We practice this the first week of school. Seriously. Everyone takes their turn at the sharpener.

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 14:29:35 -0500  
From: Ellen Berg  
Subject: Rick: Getting here from there

Rick,

I, like so many others, am amazed and thankful for your thoughts and insights into being more effective in our profession. I look at what you have achieved, and I think to myself, "That's where I want to be."

Being in this profession for going on eight years now, I understand that becoming a master teacher is a process rather than an event. When I first began teaching I was sure I was going to get it all right the first year or I would be a failure. It's a pretty common thought among newer teachers I've known--I had a mentee who was afraid to take a day off sick (bronchitis!!) for fear she would be a bad teacher if she did!

Could you share a little about your journey from novice to master teacher with us for the benefit of all the newer teachers on the list?

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 16:22:24 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

>How do you handle the whole bathroom pass issue?

I've only been at this for four years (all in an elementary, self-contained classrooms with fourth and fifth graders), but I'll give my two cents as well! When my students need to use the restroom, I have them form a 'T' with their hands (like the sign for time-out) and if it is not during an important part of a lesson, I nod my head nonchalantly to agree they may go. This does sound a little demeaning now that I think about it...but it was something I felt was necessary. It prevented any one student from going too often.

My door frame was metal and two magnets were placed there--one for girls and another for boys. On the left hand side of the door frame I stapled two envelopes in which I had an index card for each student. As they quietly exited the room, they removed their name card from the envelope, put it up on the door frame with the magnet and left. This way I knew who was gone to the bathroom at all times, which was helpful, especially if there was a fire drill. A little more than half way through the year I told my students they had gained my trust to go when they needed to and not have to sign to me. They still to put their name up, however.

In the past I have had 'pencil sharpening hours' posted by the pencil sharpeners...before the school day begins and after we write homework down (remember this was in a self-contained classroom). They were also to be sure that they had 2 pencils sharpened at the beginning of each day.

This year I think I may do something similar...pencil sharpening right at the beginning of the period and a couple minutes prior to leaving. I found that this led to fewer disruptions. As far as tissues...I place two boxes of tissues in the back of the classroom in different places so that students may get up to get a tissue without disturbing the class.

Hope this helps!  
--Carrie :)

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 16:38:11 EDT  
From: MKrause  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I hear a lots of interesting ideas about classroom rules/passes. However, I think the key is that the work going on in the classroom needs to be interesting and stimulating enough that that is where kids WANT to be.

Ideally, kids are working in small groups on projects of their choosing (whatever the academic discipline). Then bathroom excuses, excessive sharpening, tissue usage, etc. are minimal and only when necessary. I feel it's important to give middle school kids the responsibility for deciding when to use the bathroom - after all, I see a primary objective of my job is to help them develop into independent learners (I tell them I will have done a good job when they do not need me anymore!). OBVIOUSLY, this all sounds good and doesn't always work just as planned - what does in middle school?! In which case, at the end of class I might have a brief, private conversation with a "pass-offender" to see what's up. These conversations can be illuminating.

Meg Krause

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 13:47:18 -0700  
From: fijifamily  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

A few years back, I closed my daycare business, substitute taught and planned on returning to school to get my master's degree. I joined several teacher chatboards and was very surprised to see several pages of posts all about sharpening pencils! I read them all, of course, because I couldn't even begin to imagine what was so hard about sharpening pencils!

Wow! Those posts were a real eye opener and my first encounter with the need to have and teach procedures for everything. So, as to your question, yes, you will definitely need a procedure for sharpening pencils, getting tissues, a drink of water, asking a question, turning in papers, etc., etc.

Rules are different than procedures. Rules are simple statements that describe what behaviors the teacher expects. Procedures are step-by-step directions for how and when a teacher wants something done, such as sharpening a pencil.

What procedures you decide to use will depend on your situation and your students needs. I did a long term sub position in a life skills class and I didn't have any problems with kids sharpening pencils at all. I had simple procedures that allowed them to sharpen their pencils as needed as long as it wasn't while I was speaking to the class. I had no problems and this procedure worked well in that class.

I was then transferred to a 6th grade language arts/social studies, which was a two hour block. I quickly realized how teachers could fill several pages about sharpening pencils! LOL!! The classroom was equipped with one electric pencil sharpener and the first day, the kids kept it running nonstop until it overheated and quit working!

Day two, I implemented the procedure of allowing students to sharpen two pencils either before class or during the first 5 minutes of class time while the kids were doing bell work. Very few kids sharpened their pencils during this time, but amazingly kids complained that BOTH their pencils were breaking and they NEEDED to sharpen them during class. Not!! They wre breaking the tips because they used sharpening pencil time to wander around the classroom chatting to their friends.

Day 3, I gathered all the dropped pencils from the hallways, supplemented with some golf pencils and made these already sharpened pencils available for anyone whose pencil happened to "break." I also let them know that I'd be happy to chat with their parents about getting them some stronger pencils if broken pencils caused them to need to borrow more than 1 of my pencils.



Problem solved.

So, yes, pencil sharpening and other procedures will need to be taught, practiced and retaught over the first couple weeks of school. Have fun!

Roxanne in WA

[who didn't even mention mechanical pencils, personal sharpeners, losing pencils, jacking (stealing) pencils, erasers or the other myriad problems with pencils - lol!! ]

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 17:04:54 -0500  
From: Nicole Foster  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I tell my students they need to get a pencil sharpener with a shavings catcher for my class. Most kids can buy one; if not, I give them out as little "prizes." Usually someone near will have one and they even get where they put them on their desks to use and pass them around. A student raises his pencil up and everyone knows the problem. (I did this one year when we went through 2 of the regular pencil sharpeners in a year! From then on, there was no pencil sharpener problem.)  
Nicole

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 18:10:58 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I have 2 wooden passes I made from cheese boards - one says "Mrs. George Bathroom Pass" the other Mrs. George's Hall pass. They are hanging by the exit door. If I (or someone else) am not in front of the class, students may grab and go, only with bathroom pass. That way I know only one at a time is gone.

I've not had trouble with abuse except one young man who was discovered to be meeting his girlfriend every day at preset times (not just during my class.... thank goodness!). The other pass is for going to locker, errands for me, high school or elem. buildings.

Pencils... WOW! I have a cup (like someone else said...scrounge the floor - talk to the custodian) full of pencils/golf pencils available but NO sharpening during presentation by me or anyone else. I have a sharpener in front and back for easy accessibility.

Kleenex - at least 2 boxes at all times - we do on occasion stop for loud blowers - they are usually embarrassed and get the idea to be quieter next time. Kids get up when they need a tissue whenever - if they get up several times, I may suggest they grab a few tissues to take to their seat.

Water - bring a bottle - I do have a sink in my classroom so kids can fill bottles there (even though it is not as cold as the hall fountain, if you are THIRSTY it is wet).

My class is pretty relaxed during work times so kids are milling around anyway so it never seems to be a problem with any of these areas.

Cossondra George  
Newberry Middle School

**Editor's Note:** See Cossondra's [2012 interview](#) with MiddleWeb, "The Goddess of Good Advice."

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 18:25:54 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: sub plans & effort grades

I'm reading Rick's book -- and I love the detailed sub plans!! I thought I was the only person who was so meticulous ( and mine are nothing compared to yours, Rick!!) but subs do appreciate the effort as do the students!

My classes hate to have their routines interrupted so virtually minute by minute plans really keep the ball moving the way they are used to having it. It also does away with the complaints when I return of she didn't do this or he did that differently. One thing I add, I leave a good read for the teacher (especially for AR time) usually a middle school book or my latest favorite "How to Talk So Kids Can Learn" something the sub can read a few pages from for inspiration, and education. I try to vary these since our sub pool is small. Subs often ask to borrow these to finish, so it is a great way to educate these fellow educators in our philosophies and make them feel respected.

I also really enjoyed Rick's "[Achievement vs. Work Habits](#)" (pg 81) comparison. I struggle with this concept myself every time I complete report card grades - your perspective, Rick, is helping me develop a plan for fall that I can justify and stick with.

Cossondra George

**Editor's Note:** See Cossondra's [2012 interview](#) with MiddleWeb, "The Goddess of Good Advice."

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 18:58:44 -0400  
From: John Norton  
Subject: Rick will be along...

Rick will be along soon. Meanwhile, please continue to talk quietly among yourselves. ☺

We have many veteran teachers on the list, and I encourage new folks to pose any question you have. We're focusing on practical matters, and no question is too simple - if you don't know the answer!

John

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 19:18:53 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: Rick will be along...

I read Rick's book earlier when it was first published and I highlighted favorite content by writing comments in margins. When I started to write my response for the book chat earlier, there was a notation on page 64 I could not make out. But I figured it out!!!

The comment was "Zac" with a smiley face. Why?

Rick suggests [using cartoons in handouts](#) to draw attention to topics or specifics. I have tried to collect every possible math related cartoon I can find and often start class with one on the overhead that somehow relates to our lesson for the day. One particularly "un-humorous" 7th grader (named Zac, of course) rudely interrupted the reading of the daily cartoon with, "Why do you ALWAYS have to have those STUPID cartoons? What are we? Kindergartners?"

As I stood there trying to NOT strangle Zac as I pointed out all the hours spent looking for cartoons and making overheads of them, trying desperately to come up/not come up with an appropriately CRUEL come back (it was last hour on one of those rare 90 degree days when the kids and I were all melted and exhausted from the thick humidity and heat so ..... my patience was GONE, long gone.... )

when ... from the other corner.....

"Well, Zac, if that's how you feel, why'd you complain to Mrs. Smith earlier today that she NEVER has cartoons?"

(I was polite.... I simply smiled, finished reading the cartoon, and proceeded as planned...saved by the young man with a very appropriately timed sense of humor)

Point of story.... kids do appreciate those little extras - like cartoons - that we do for them.

Cossondra George

**Editor's Note:** See Cossondra's [2012 interview](#) with MiddleWeb, "The Goddess of Good Advice."

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 19:33:19 -0700  
From: Allison Gaines  
Subject: Possible consequences

Hello Rick and all...

I read Day One and [the discipline chapter](#) with particular interest because I'm searching for a good list of possible, and ascending, consequences. I want to be very clear on my "day one" (and in the beyond!) that there are specific consequences for choosing to act out. I want to post them, discuss them, and even practice them, but I don't have a great group of ideas to call on that come BEFORE the biggies--eg. call parents, office etc.

I know of some--exclude from activity, hall, etc. but I have to say that logistically, a lot of them seem somewhat troublesome because then I have to leave instruction to deal with that kid instead of with the other kids I want to be working with.

So, can folks recommend some good CONCRETE examples of logical, progressive possible consequences for students?

Allison Gaines

**Editor's note:** For some 2012 thoughts about behavior management, check out the archive and related handouts from [our late July webinar](#) with Rick and two other veteran middle grades teachers. Also see [this post](#) by Anthony Cody at the MiddleWeb site, which aligns with the webinar advice.

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 17:36:12 -0600  
From: Cynthia Huffstodt  
Subject: Re: Cartoons

Have you found some great sources for these cartoons? I will be teaching math this year and would love to do this too! I have tried to find science related cartoons with little success.

Cindy H.  
Albuquerque, NM

**Editor's note:** Try the google image link for [education cartoons](#). Check for usage rules. Mark Anderson at [Andertoons](#) has good classroom/school cartoons and will likely grant classroom usage rights if you send him a note and promise to only use with students during lessons.

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 19:55:59 -0400  
From: Nina Newlin  
Subject: Re: Detailed sub plans.

The [detailed sub plans](#) (In our system, we are working hard to change that name to visiting teachers) were great. I have been involved in giving workshops to visiting teachers and its amazing how often those folks get woefully inadequate plans. and you have to remember this, subbing is, after driving a bus, the hardest job in the system. You cannot give a visiting teacher too much information!

I'd also advocate a feedback form, so the visiting teacher can let you know what you can do to improve his or her experience. After all, none of us want to be known as the middle school no sub will go to!!!

Nina

Virginia Strong Newlin, NBCT  
Principal

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 17:04:52 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: T-chart idea

I love [the T-chart idea](#), Rick. I love the visuals of the ear and the eyes for establishing cooperative group behavior. I plan to share this with our teachers this Wednesday when they come in for pre-contact planning. The common complaint at my school with our veteran teachers who were not accustomed to co-ops, had a difficult time with the discipline during co-op activities. Your section on this helps them understand that giving the kids rules is not sufficient and by providing a visual on a chart (all teachers chart daily with their students) serves as a constant reminder to the students of the expectations.

Since we are a community of learners, through your book we can all read how one expert is able to link this strategy with the content. Sometimes our teachers get so involved with their content that anything else is considered an extra burden they are asked to do. I plan use an excerpt from your book (if..... you are a middle school teacher) as read-aloud to start us off.

Melba Yvette Smithwick  
Campus-Based Staff Developer  
Corpus Christi ISD

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 20:07:26 EDT

From: Dmsteach  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Hi,

Pencil sharpening, bathroom hall passes, nose blowing, etc...are all procedures that you will need to explain ASAP to 6th graders (the first time our students change classes) for each class period. I try to keep the tone light and give them situations when they do NOT need my permission (emergency bathroom breaks, nose bleeds, etc.) Other times, they should use respect (we discuss that, too) about interruptions and then we get so busy with activities that most of the time, it doesn't become an issue. I keep a big container of 'yucky' pencils that the custodian collects for me as well as the little golf pencils - available anytime as needed. Tissues are available (placed within reach around the room) at all times - donated by my homeroom students at the start of each year.

I've found that if you get into power struggles about these details, the kids will spend all their time trying to 'get one over' on you. As long as you give your expectations about these procedures and keep the students engaged with the learning activities the problems are minimized.

Another thing is to be consistent about 'your' procedures...think them through, present them, then remember them. Many students need lots of reminders in the beginning of the year, but after a few weeks things should run smoothly.

Jeanie Dotson

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 21:26:41 -0400  
From: Eileen Bendixsen  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Bathroom Pass:

The building rule is that there can only be one person out at a time. Each teacher has a wooden pass with a hole in it that they can hang on the hook by the door. They must sign in and out. In my science classes and math class they ask to go out and can leave as long as direct instruction is not going on. Math class is right after lunch and 75 minutes long. I know many of them leave just to leave for a few minutes, but as long as they are gone for only a couple of minutes and I don't find out that they have gone out more than one other period during the day I let them go. It usually takes less time than arguing with them.

Last year so many went out during math that I started with a different lab table (you could use row) each day and I let them know when to start and they simply went table to table. Before that I would correct homework and explain the day's concept and then ask who needed to go out. There were so many interruptions or arguments about who was next that I came up with the rotation system and that worked really well. The only thing I don't like about students taking the pass and simply

leaving is that with labs going on you could easily not realize someone has left the room. In a quieter situation it might work.

The can get a tissue at any time, although I have had students who seem to use this as a way to get up out of their seat and talk to someone. Having allergies myself I always hesitate to say anything to them that I think they are looking for an excuse. Again in science during labs they are up and around anyway, so it is no big deal. If this becomes a problem you could have a couple of boxes in locations that would minimize the disruption.

As soon as they come in for math class they are expected to get their pencil out and get it sharpened if it needs to be sharpened. In middle school they like to break them so they can get up and sharpen them. I do let them get up when they need to but again not during direct instruction.

I actually try not to let these things annoy me because then it becomes a game that they can get you on. I do not make a big deal of this the first day of school. I sometimes think that making too much of it sometimes gives them ideas that might not occur until later in the year. If it becomes a problem in any class I then address it and my rules become a little stricter.

Eileen

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 21:31:36 -0400  
From: Eileen Bendixsen  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

>Obviously there are  
>exceptions, but expecting them to come to class prepared and having  
>attended to any bathroom needs between classes is certainly much easier to  
>manage.

I'm curious to know how they can do this. We only have two minutes between classes and I insist that they come to class in time. In my school, going to the bathroom in between would mean students coming late to class and even if only one kid needed to go they would definitely have a buddy that would stop along with them so that they could still walk to class together.

Eileen

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 21:37:08 -0400  
From: Eileen Bendixsen  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

At 04:38 PM 07/28/2003 -0400, you wrote:

>I hear a lots of interesting ideas about clarsroom rules/passes. However, I

>think the key is that the work going on in the classroom needs to be  
>interesting and stimulating enough that that is where kids WANT to  
>be. Ideally, kids  
>are working in small groups on projects of their choosing (Whatever the  
>academic discipline).

I agree completely. I've always had very few students leave during science which is hands-on. Math which is so LONG and more written work is when they ask to go. Being after lunch which is only 25 minutes from bell to bell makes it a good time for them, as far as they see, to go as well. They can go at lunch, but it is so short and if they buy their lunch there isn't a great deal of time and passes are limited.

Eileen

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 21:54:16 -0400  
From: Matt  
Subject: Classroom Rules

We give them 3 minutes between classes, which is usually enough time. However, I do make it clear that as long as they tell me they need to use the bathroom (and don't abuse it), I don't mind if they are a couple of minutes late. If they walk in late and haven't told me ahead of time where they were, they are tardy, regardless of their excuse.

Matt

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**RICK JOINS THE CHAT**

**DOAB = Day One and Beyond**

Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 22:13:04 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Rick will be along...

Hi Everyone -- I'm here! I had a Daddy duty to perform this evening that kept me from being with you. My 9 year-old daughter went to summer camp yesterday and forgot her ear plugs and ear bandit for swimming. I had to drive both of them out to her. She's had multiple tubes in her ears so she has to wear them every time she swims.

I'm back now and responding to the e-mail messages. Thanks for your patience. I'll be checking in at least once each morning, afternoon and evening every day this week.

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 20:25:05 -0600  
From: Brenda A Dyck  
Subject: Take Advantage of Those First Days

I don't why, but students seem more willing to absorb new procedures during those beginning days. Once I figured that out I now take full advantage of it.

I remember trying to establish a "in the front door, out the back door" procedure a couple of months into the year (it took me that long to realize that the chaos that accompanied class switches had much to do with two classes meeting head-on at my front door). It was almost impossible to get them to follow my new procedure. They never did get it. The next year I explained the door thing to my new class the first hour I had them and after a week they had it down pat.

That's why this book chat discussion topic is so important. It will get us all thinking about what we want to implement the first day. The rest of the year will be a walk in the park...right? ;>)

Brenda

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 22:23:13 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Let's start our chat about Day One!

Hi Ka-Rhonda -- There are a buhjillion different kinds of grade and record books out there. Choose one that works for you. In the first few years of service, however, you might try different structures -- that's fine. I prefer books that have the days of the week on the left vertical axis with my periods (or subjects) across the top. The turn of each page reveals a new week. It'll help, too, if you accept the fact that teachers who are responding to the needs of students often have messy grade books -- or at least arrows and cross-outs indicating a change of plans from one day to the next. It's a sign of flexibility and differentiated instruction.

I worry about pristine lesson plan books that were completed a week or two prior to the lessons and show no adaptations based on students' responses to current lessons.

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

As a new teacher to the middle school, I was wondering what is the best lesson plan/ record book to buy when you have 100 plus students. All of the ones that I have seen are for elementary.

Thanks,  
Ka-Rhonda

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 22:39:42 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Hi Joanne -- I noticed a number of folks responding to this message. I haven't read those ideas yet, but I'm working my way there. My initial response is this: I am no expert. I can tell you what works for me and a few others, but wow, I'm far from knowing the ultimate wisdom on this. For the most part, my students only go to the bathroom when the pass is available. If the pass isn't on the chalk tray or the shelf near the door, they can't go. Some years I've used students' assignment notebooks as the bathroom pass, however, and that works, too. Still, though, only one at a time, unless it's an emergency. Students usually just take the classroom pass and go.

We do talk about when it's appropriate -- during quiet seat work, for example. Students are to do everything they can to not miss direct instruction or small group work. If a student is a chronic abuser of the bathroom pass, his privileges are denied, but we talk for a while beforehand. This is tricky ground, however, because by school district mandates (and county law?) we cannot deny a student access to the bathroom. To be honest, sometimes young adolescents need to go to the bathroom, but not necessarily to use the toilet. In an insecure and sometimes overwhelming world they need a time-out, a chance to throw water on their faces, stare at themselves in the mirror, or sit in the stall and think quietly for a moment. I don't have a problem with this as long as it's infrequent and healthy.

I've moved away from allowing a particular number of uses of the bathroom pass per grading period. It became a paper chase and game with students, and unforeseen things kept forcing me to bend the rules -- kidney infections, a class celebration in which we served a lot to drink, colder and warmer weather, classroom spills that required students to use the bathroom to clean-up. It's easier and more effective to teach students how to handle the bathroom with maturity than employ an allotment system.

For the other areas you mention, teach students to think for themselves. They will never learn or take responsibility if we are the gatekeeper for every little thing. We won't have time to teach, in fact, because we're regulating everything. I talk very seriously about doing such things prior to the start of our lessons, but life gets in the way almost every time. In the middle of my lessons, I often have to get more chalk, grab a tissue, sharpen a pencil, etc., so it would be hypocritical of me to demand my students take care of such things prior to their learning. We can do all those things, however, at appropriate times and in appropriate ways, and

those are what I teach students and to which I hold them accountable.  
'Basic courtesy amidst life's realities.

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 22:43:41 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I agree, Liz, with your approach. When I find out that students are abusing such privileges, however, I usually stop and have a class meeting about the problem, even if just for a few minutes. It usually starts with, "Some individuals have taken advantage of our system for checking in and out of class to use the bathroom. This cannot continued. I'm open for suggestions on how to convince these individuals to respect our rules and rebuild the trust we've placed in them..."

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Joanne - I usually have let them just get up and sharpen pencils themselves and get their own tissues. Goodness knows I don't want to be a tissue-fetcher during cold season! I point out to them where I keep the tissue boxes and where the sharpeners are, and haven't had any problems with it.

Liz

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 22:51:51 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: T-chart idea

Thanks, Paulette. Somebody shared that idea with me about 18 years ago when we were talking about cooperative learning strategies and it's stuck with me ever since. I use it a lot. As far as seating in rows goes, I understand your point. Rows make memorizing names easier. I urge you to move students into positions in which no student is no more than two or three desks away from you, however, as soon as you can. It'll help tremendously.

I'm very grateful for your comment that veteran teachers can find helpful information in Day One and Beyond. I almost regret writing the word "new" in the title, because practical ideas are helpful to everyone -- veterans and new teachers alike. I'm sure if others wrote books on practical ideas of middle level teaching, I'd get a bunch out of them - ideas I'd never considered. I appreciate your open mind about professional development and reading.

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 22:58:02 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Intro and gradebook/lesson plan book

Hi Carrie -- Thanks for bringing up these ideas. The first one is particularly important, especially for parents and policy-makers. We have to get the word out that middle schools are very different from junior high schools and that it takes specific expertise to work successfully with middle school students. They aren't junior versions of high school students.

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Hi!

I am also a new teacher to the middle school--our district has changed our 4-5 self-contained building to a 5-6 middle school building. I have been teaching fifth grade for 2 years now and love it! One concern I have is that we may be encouraging the kids grow up more quickly because they are now part of a middle school model. I really like how Rick delineated the difference between a junior high and middle school, especially since I had no idea there was a difference!

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:08:59 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Matt, You sound reasonable and approachable. Your students sense your respect for them, I bet, and therefore go out of their way to follow your protocols. Your approach works well. There are some teachers, however, who don't explain their rationale, and rules such as yours foster resentment. You've probably found what others have found that most students respond to rules well when it doesn't feel as if something is being done to them, but rather with them. Sure, you impose your restrictions, but you also accept reality and trust them to live up to the expectations of their growing maturity. It's a collaboration of sorts to do this thing called, school." - Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

I guess I'm at the opposite end of the spectrum on this one. As a general rule, students do not leave my room during class. Obviously there are exceptions, but expecting them to come to class prepared and having attended to any bathroom needs between classes is certainly much easier to

manage.  
Matt

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:09:01 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Hi Ellen -- I do this, too! I know it sounds silly, but you're right, students need practice and an image of following the rules. We practice moving into groups, turning in papers, getting out equipment, and other classroom procedures, just as we might with elementary school students. A few times of doing so enables us to work efficiently later in the year. It's worth the extra time earlier in the year.

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Joanne,

I'm not Rick ;-), but I'll be happy to share my pencil sharpener procedure with you. Students may sharpen their pencils:

1. If I'm not currently teaching/giving instructions;
2. If there is no other student at or moving toward the pencil sharpener;
3. If they're taking notes during lecture, the lead breaks and they raise their hands for permission.

We practice this the first week of school. Seriously. Everyone takes their turn at the sharpener.

Ellen

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:22:01 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Carrie -- I really like your magnetized people on the door frame idea. I have to remember that one. I'm hesitant for students to be forced to do a public display of the need to use the bathroom, however, such as you suggest with the "T" hand sign. It might prohibit some folks from going when they really should go. Sometimes one of my female students gets her period and has to use the bathroom right away but wants to be discreet. A public declaration of her need to use the bathroom won't make things any easier for her.

How do you handle students whose pencils break while writing? I agree with requiring two sharpened pencils, but sometimes they only have one and it breaks. Do they sit quietly and get nothing done, or do you bend your rule and allow them to sharpen their pencils in the middle of class? I've done both routes in the past, and 'never liked the first option so I've tended toward the second.

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

>How do you handle the whole bathroom pass issue?

I've only been at this for four years (all in an elementary, self-contained classrooms with fourth and fifth graders), but I'll give my two cents as well! When my students need to use the restroom, I have them form a 'T' with their hands (like the sign for time-out) and if it is not during an important part of a lesson, I nod my head nonchalantly to agree they may go. This does sound a little demeaning now that I think about it...but it was something I felt was necessary. It prevented the any one student from going too often. My door frame was metal and two magnet persons were placed there--one for girls and another for boys. On the left hand side of the door frame I stapled two envelopes in which I had an index card for each student. As they quietly exited the room, they removed their namecard from the envelope, put it up on the door frame with the magnet person and left. This way I knew who was gone to the bathroom at all times, which was helpful, especially if there was a fire drill. A little more than half way through the year I told my students they had gained my trust to go when they needed to and not have to sign to me. They still to put their name up, however.

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:26:25 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Well said, Meg. Instilling a sense of self-analysis and community building is always a healthy discipline approach. I particularly like the "private" aspect of the pass-offender. If it grows to more than one student, it might require a class meeting to discuss the problem, but talking with students privately is almost always the best first step.

Your thinking supports Oscar Wilde's reminder that the goal of any teacher is to put himself [or herself] out of a job. -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

I hear a lots of interesting ideas about clasrsroom rules/passes. However, I think the key is that the work going on in the classroom needs to be interesting and stimulating enough that that is where kids WANT to be.

Ideally, kids are working in small groups on projects of their choosing (Whatever the academic discipline). Then bathroom excuses, excessive sharpening, tissue usage, etc. are minimal and only when necessary. I feel it's important to give middle school kids the responsibility for deciding when to use the bathroom - after all, I see a primary objective of my job is to help them develop into independent learners (I tell them I will have done a good job when they do not need me anymore!). OBVIOUSLY, this all sounds good and doesn't always work just as planned - what does in middle school?! In which case, at the end of class I might have a brief, private conversation with a "pass-offender" to see what's up.

These conversations can be illuminating.  
Meg Krause

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:32:10 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Hi Roxanne -- This is great! Thanks for sharing your experiences. I just wanted to add that I used to have an electric pencil sharpener in my room, and I removed it because of the noise as well as the jamming/overheating factors you describe below. The wall-mounted manual one doesn't break down as much and it's quieter. I'm not anti-technology, I just haven't found a quiet, durable electronic sharpener yet. :-)

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:45:51 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: sub plans & effort grades

Hi Cossondra -- Thanks for your kind words about the sub plans. I agree with everything you've said here about how important detailed plans are to substitute teachers. I get great feedback from substitute teachers, thanking me for the plans. Interestingly, I was admonished by an administrator one time for having such detailed plans. I couldn't believe it. He said that the plans took too long to read and consequently prevented substitute teachers from getting to work. Evidently a substitute teacher had complained about the length of my plans -- four typed pages' worth.

Two pages listed the lessons for each class period and two pages described the classroom procedures and information you see listed in DOAB. When I explained my rationale for the lengthy plans and most substitutes' positive comments, he didn't respond. He sat silently. I then asked him if I could continue to do my plans this way, and he said, "okay" and that was the last I heard of it. Weird, eh?

The Achievement vs Work Habits debate for report cards and assessments is catalyst for many conversations. I would be very interested to explore

these ideas if anyone wants to pursue them. I believe that how we respond to assessment and reporting issues is a clear statement of how we see our roles as teachers. I also think that some teachers would not like the role they've carved for themselves that is communicated daily by their assessment and reporting practices if they knew about it. They don't realize the messages they are sending and if they did, they might make some changes.

-- Rick Wormeli

**Editor's note:** In 2005, Rick supplied MiddleWeb with a rich Word doc that includes [lots of ideas for sub plans](#).

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:52:12 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: use of cartoons in class

Wow, this is great, Cossondra! Thanks for sharing this. I have yet to find a grade-level that doesn't appreciate such extras, but middle school is particularly impacted by that which is novel, unique, and different. Curriculum theorists universally refer to the 10-14 year-olds as in the romanticism stage of human development. They're not referring to the hormones coursing through their veins, but to the classical interpretation of romanticism such as in the 18th century that focused on imagination and emotions. Cartoons really capture students' minds and hearts. Hey, you could make big money publishing a book of math cartoons for teachers to use in their lessons! -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Rick suggests using cartoons in handouts to draw attention to topics or specifics. I have tried to collect every possible math related cartoon I can find and often start class with one on the overhead that somehow relates to our lesson for the day.  
Cossondra George

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 00:06:38 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: T-chart idea

Thanks, Melba, for this positive feedback. [The T-chart](#) works for classroom behavior as well as content, as you mention below. The biggest impact with behavior comes in the post-activity experience, however, in which students reflect on the T-chart and to what extent they lived up to the listed criteria on both sides. That debriefing is critical. Some folks just do the first part in which the class lists the criteria for success but they don't reflect on it at the end. Without that reflection, the T-chart has



little impact.

Enjoy the excerpt "[You Might Be a Middle School Teacher.](#)" When I do it, I try to put all the Jeff Foxworthy or "Redneck" into it that I can. Marjorie Shepherd (the author of the piece) is a wonderfully professional voice for reason here in Virginia. She really speaks her mind with policymakers and her common sense approach has earned her many accolades. -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Ditto on the T-chart idea, Rick. I love the visuals of the ear and the eyes for establishing cooperative group behavior.

Melba Yvette Smithwick

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 00:14:34 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

These are great ideas, Eileen. I just want to emphasize those classes right after lunch. Teachers need to employ more flexibility during these classes. Sometimes what students ate or drank for lunch catches up with them rather suddenly and they need to go. Also, some of my students still need to be reminded to use the bathroom because they come back from the cafeteria involved in conversations and they forget to go. A courtesy reminder at the door prevents many of the later interruptions.

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 00:18:44 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Take Advantage of Those First Days

Hi Brenda -- I couldn't agree more. Have students practice these things just for their own sake. The beginning of the year finds students very impressionable. We can't waste the time, and we enjoy teaching so much more for taking the time early on to establish classroom tone and procedures. 'A walk in the park? Maybe. How about, "a walk in a funhouse?" "...an Alberta wilderness?" "a walk among future great leaders?" :-)' -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

I don't why, but students seem more willing to absorb new procedures during those beginning days. Once I figured that out I now take full advantage of it....

That's why this book chat discussion topic is so important. It will get us all thinking about what we want to implement the first day. The rest of the year will be a walk in the park...right? ;>)

Brenda

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 00:40:00 -0400  
From: Heather Migdon  
Subject: Re: Bathroom break

Many schools in DC "mandate" a morning and afternoon bathroom break for students sixth grade and under. I hate it! Rarely do all kids in the class have to use the bathroom at the same time. Is this a battle I shoot fight with my admins, or should I try to motivate my kids (4th grade) to whittle the break down to 5-7 minutes? (Of course, I welcome a creative choice "C.")

Heather Migdon

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 00:55:01 -0400  
From: Heather Migdon  
Subject: Re: Pencil sharpeners

Because I've taught younger children, my approach is a bit different. Electric sharpeners are too much fun, which leads children to sharpening pencils that don't need to be sharpened. I either trade them for a short but sharp pencil from my bucket, or I let them use my manual, hand-held one. (They do have time to sharpen pencils in the morning and after lunch.)

Heather, 4th grade

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## **JULY 29**

Topics of the day:

1. Let's start our chat about Day One!
2. Classroom Rules (10)
3. Possible consequences (7)
4. calling roll (5)
5. sub plans & effort grades
6. Pencil sharpeners
7. Intro and gradebook/lesson plan book (8)
8. Cartoons - Math
9. Detailed sub plans.
10. reflection
11. Pencils and potty breaks

12. reflective practitioner (3)
13. Rick's 4.0 grading scale (2)
14. Chapter on Teaming (2)
15. back this evening
16. Discipline vs. classroom management (2)
17. Preparedness Mark (2)
18. Becoming a Reflective Practitioner (4)
19. <No subject given> (6)
20. Doorstops and Other Botherations (3)
21. Pencils and the bathroom....the bane of my existence!!!!
22. More on erasable pens -- was Classroom rules
23. Chewing gum (4)
24. lesson plan books (2)
25. Mess Grade Books (2)
26. blogging

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:44:39 -0700  
From: fijifamily  
Subject: Re: Let's start our chat about Day One!

I use post-it notes in my plan book. I record the lesson and activity ideas on the post-it notes and then if I have to change something, I can just move the post-it notes around or change them without erasing and messing up my plan book. I got this idea from another teacher and it works great, especially for a new teacher who makes lots of mistakes and changes! Lol!!

Roxanne in WA

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Date: Mon, 28 Jul 2003 23:58:03 -0700  
From: fijifamily  
Subject: Re: Possible consequences

Hmmm. . .either this one got posted late or it got overlooked, but I'd be interested in hearing an ascending list of consequences too. Roxanne in WA

> Hello Rick and all...

>

> I read Day One and the discipline chapter with particular interest because  
> I'm searching for a good list of possible, and ascending, consequences. I  
> want to be very clear on my "day one" (and in the beyond!) that there are  
> specific consequences for choosing to act out. I want to post them,  
discuss them, and even practice them, but I don't have a great group of ideas to  
> call on that come BEFORE the biggies--eg. call parents, office etc....  
> So, can folks recommend some good CONCRETE examples of logical,  
progressive possible consequences for students?

>

> Allison Gaines

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 06:53:46 EDT  
From: Dmsteach  
Subject: calling roll

Rick - I chuckled over [the story in Chapter 2](#) about calling roll. We've all faced the quandry of mispronouncing uncommon names or just plain reading them incorrectly, like saying Danielle instead of Daniel and having all the boys laugh at Daniel's discomfort.

Have any of you ever had the students say their names and then you check them off your list instead of stumbling over names? That would help with pronouncing them correctly, learning which name they want used (middle names, nicknames, etc.), and would also give the teacher a quick read on which students are very outgoing or very shy? I may try that this year along with a brief dialog for each student - something like a comment or question for each student. I know we have to hurry through so much but this year I want to make my students feel like he or she belongs (to use the quote from Ch. 2) from the first day. I also know that all those things that must be done right away will somehow get done so I'd like to begin with a more relaxed pace. Any thoughts?

Jeanie Dotson

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 07:16:49 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Hi Rick and others--

First of all, I wanted to say how great it is that Rick is responding to the posts that have been made already. I can't even imagine how much time you've spent in front of the computer! Thank you for acknowledging our thoughts and commenting on them.

As far as the bathroom sign...the students just hold up the 'T' in front of their chest which is very discrete. Most of the time no other students realize what's happened until the student has left the room. I started this method when I was teaching 4th grade in NC where there seemed to be a more strict hold on the students than the procedures I have experienced in my current position (CT). I'm not sure why that is, maybe it's part of the culture.

My students are fifth graders and I think that some still need that structure as far as using the restroom...but your comments and the comments of others have caused me to rethink this. Thank you for that!

Now I'm thinking maybe I'll just do the magnets on the door frame instead since it's a visual for both the students and I and less disruptive (sometimes I lose my train of thought when they show me the 'T' sign! or have to say there's someone else out). They knew if someone's name was up, they'd have to wait until the person who was out was back.

Thanks again for sharing your thoughts, procedures and experiences, every one!

--Carrie :)

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 07:46:26 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker  
Subject: Re: sub plans & effort grades

Rick wrote...

*The Achievement vs Work Habits debate for report cards and assessments is catalyst for many conversations.*

On our school's report card (remember, it's an intermediate school), there is a section called "Work Habits". These are the descriptors which we rate on a basis of 1 (Demonstrating Consistent Behavior) 2 (Developing and Refining Behavior) or 3 (Beginning to exhibit behavior).

Works Cooperatively  
Strives to produce high quality work  
Follows directions  
Completes homework on time  
Seeks help when necessary  
Participates in discussions and activities  
Uses time efficiently

These are not calculated into the academic grades, but instead stand alone to indicate the status/progress of these skills. On all of my rubrics I have the students grade themselves once they finish the project or assignment. There is always a section (depending on if they worked in groups or independently) about their work habits in general, but it is not weighted as much as the academic sections. I believe having this as part of the assessment is important because working together is part of real life.

--Carrie :)

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 07:21:17 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Re: Pencil sharpeners

One of my teammates and I require the use of pens (preferably erasable) for use in class. Both of us have stick pens and erasable pens for sale in our team store. No pencils, no need for a pencil sharpener. The

papers are also much easier for me to read as the pen creates a better contrast on paper.

We teach social studies and science, but it works for us. ;)

Mendy Gannon  
Lady's Island Middle School  
Sixth Grade

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 08:08:03 -0400  
From: Bill Ivey  
Subject: Re: calling roll

On Tuesday, Jul 29, 2003, at 06:53 America/New\_York, Dmsteach6@AOL.COM wrote:

> Have any of you ever had the students say their names and then you  
> check them  
> off your list instead of stumbling over names?

Hi!

Sort of... I often will start the first class of the year by playing a couple of name games. I study the list ahead of time so I have some idea of spellings (and of course guesses at pronunciations), and then we do the following:

1. Form a circle. Introduce yourself to the first student to your left, and ask how they are doing. They will introduce themselves, and so on. Move on around the circle talking to each student in turn. Meanwhile, the students are following around behind you (the first student on your left turning to talk to the second student on your left, etc.) so that by the end everyone has greeted everybody.

2. Reform your circle. Now say "I'm Bill and I'm a guitar" (or whatever your equivalent name and identifying object is). The next student to your right will say "I'm Kian and I'm a baseball bat, and you're Bill and you're a guitar" and so on around the circle. At the end, you get to try to go all the way around the circle!

You get to hear students pronounce their own names at least twice, plus several other iterations pronounced by other students. It gives you a good head start!

Take care,  
Bill Ivey  
Pine Cobble School, Williamstown, MA  
Stoneleigh-Burnham School, Greenfield, MA

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 08:22:17 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: Re: Detailed sub plans.

When any of you are referencing something from [Rick's book](#), could you please mention the chapter it was in? Some are obvious but others are not. As we discuss and all these great ideas are flowing, I want to go back and read the details! Thanks much!

Paulette

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:23:58 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: calling roll

This is a great idea, Jeanie. It makes sense. I'd like to try it with new classes down the road. The only concern I have is my own memories of calling out my name to the teacher in front of the whole class. For some reason it was a little embarrassing to call out, "Rick Wormeli," in front of my classmates. Maybe it opened me or my name to ridicule or at least I thought it did. I wasn't one of the cool/popular kids in middle school, so I tried not to draw attention to myself that first week of school. I didn't want to stand out. This wouldn't prevent me from using your idea, but it gives me pause. 'No big conclusions -- 'just thinking out loud.

Someone read that opening story in chapter two and told me about his similar experience, except the child's last name was "Kno." The first name was the same as the student in the story in DOAB. Put the two together and it gets very awkward. This sort of thing happens a lot in my community just outside of D.C. with many cultures living together. A number of years ago, three sweet, studious, but very shy girls came up to me privately and explained that they were having trouble with the itinerant art teacher who came to our room every week. They said that the teacher was wonderful, but that they couldn't concentrate with everyone calling her name throughout the hour she was with us. In their native country, her name translated as, "Gay Butt." Every time students called the teacher's name for a question, they were horrified. -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

I chuckled over the story in Chapter 2 about calling roll. We've all faced the quandry of mispronouncing uncommon names or just plain reading them incorrectly, like saying Danielle instead of Daniel and having all the boys laugh at Daniel's discomfort.

Have any of you ever had the students say their names and then you check them off your list instead of stumbling over names?

Jeanie Dotson

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:37:14 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Hi Carrie -- It looks like you take care of the "not wanting to publicly declare the need for the bathroom" concern well, so don't change it if it works for you.

Your other comments made me curious: Why don't you allow students to use pens in the first half of the school year? What is your indicator that students are ready to use them halfway through the year?

Thanks for all of your great ideas and comments, too, Carrie. You have a lot of wisdom with sharing! -- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:38:03 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Intro and gradebook/lesson plan book

Lori -- This is a great idea! Can you share your set-up? How do you lay out the periods, days, and notations? Is it vertical or landscape style? What personal touches do you add that help you organize your day, week, and month? Do you print out all the pages for the year or just for a week or month at a time? How do you do long range planning -- just maintain it all electronically? What happens if you need to be portable with your plan book, such as when attending committee/department meetings -- is it on a laptop?

'Anyone else create their own plan books and might be willing to share their format? -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

I, too, have always made my own plan book. I use a template in Word. Of course, I'm changing my setup for middle school, but I'll still make my own. I'd always rather type than write anyway. I have used Thinkwave as my grading program and intend to use that again as well. Unless, since I'm moving to a new school, they have a grading program that everyone uses.  
Lori

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 08:47:03 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: Re: calling roll



Jeanie wrote . . .

"Have any of you ever had the students say their names and then you check them off your list instead of stumbling over names? That would help with pronouncing them correctly, learning which name they want used (middle names, nicknames, etc.), and would also give the teacher a quick read on which students are very outgoing or very shy?"

I did the old "slapping of the forehead with my palm" routine when I read this! What a great idea and so obvious! You absolutely can teach an old dog new tricks!

Paulette ;)

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 08:49:39 -0500  
From: Lori  
Subject: reflection

Although there are many great ideas in the book, I think that the biggest challenge I see for myself is to start doing [the daily reflecting Rick talks about](#). I know that when I do journaling about other things, it makes me a better person. I think that reflecting about my teaching would make me a better teacher. Rick, since I am such a "monkey see, monkey do" sort of teacher, can you give me an example (short) of how you do this?  
Lori T

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:12:43 -0500  
From: Ellen Berg  
Subject: Pencils and potty breaks

When I envisioned my teaching career, I thought kids would come in knowing what to do and how to do it. As Brenda stated, it is so important to capitalize on our students' openness those first few weeks so we can be effective the rest of the year.

After much time I've finally found two procedures that really work for me:

1. Pencils: Middle school students have \*always\* lost their pencils, left them in lockers, or left them in other classes. I finally decided it was a lot of effort for a little bit of gain to raise a fuss over this, and I started having pencils available. The problem? The pencils were never returned to me. SO, this summer I had kids sign their pencil out and cross their names out when the pencil was returned. If you lose my pencil during the period, then you must bring me a pencil the next day to replace the one you borrowed. It worked

well, and I think the kids felt responsible. I'm going to try to turn this over to a pencil monitor this school year to increase students' responsibility and sense of ownership. Like others, my pencils are ones I find on the floor or are well-used. I got a few complaints--"This is a raggedy old pencil!"--but other students told those students to stop complaining because at least they had a pencil to use.

2. Potty breaks: To curb the number of potty breaks, our team designed a bathroom pass each student receives every five weeks. The numbers 1-6 are typed at the bottom, there's a space for the student's name, and blanks for our initials, date and time. Students may use the restroom at any time they present the pass EXCEPT at the beginning of class or during instruction. All of spend 10-15 minutes at most in direct instruction, so it's not a hardship. All kids have to do is present their pass. We hole-punch, initial, date and time the pass, and kids go.

Do some kids lose their passes? Yes. Sometimes they borrow others' passes, and sometimes they talk with us privately about it. If it's the students' first time we'll give them a new pass with the comment, "Now, if others found out you got a new pass, we might have to rethink this...." It works. There are also kids who have medical reasons to go more often, and we work around that as well. Kids who want to go more than their allotted 6 times/5 weeks have to borrow from their friends. The kids really seem not to abuse the system.

Our bathroom passes arose after one young lady and her friends told our gentleman math teacher that she had to go for "personal," reasons four weeks in a row.....all of us ladies finally sat them down and expressed great concern about their health and offered to call their mothers so they could make a doctor's appointment ;-).

Ellen

Ellen Berg  
Turner MEGA Magnet Middle  
St. Louis, MO

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:14:33 -0500  
From: Ellen Berg  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

> I've found that if you get into power struggles about these details,  
> the kids  
> will spend all their time trying to 'get one over' on you.

Jeanie is so right. I've always thought the secret middle school anthem was, "You Gotta Fight for Your Right to Party!" by the Beastie

Boys. The more structured choice I give my students, the more cooperative they are.

Ellen Berg

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:29:39 -0500  
From: Ellen Berg  
Subject: Re: calling roll

> Have any of you ever had the students say their names and then you  
> check them  
> off your list instead of stumbling over names?

Jeanie,

I always call roll the first day, but I preface it with a statement. I tell them the story of how every teacher known to man mispronounced my last name (McClurg--what's so hard about that? ;-)) when I was growing up. I explain that I am doing my best, I want to pronounce their names correctly, and if I mispronounce their names they are to gently correct me. I then model it for them. I laugh at myself and apologize profusely when I make a mistake, and I think that eases the tension. I always clarify what name they would prefer to be called.

In a district where I have had many Bosnian students (Sumeja, Elvir) as well as students with unique but unfamiliar names like "Simashelaya," this practice is necessary!

Ellen Berg

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 10:12:31 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: reflective practitioner

Hi Lori -- Happy to talk about reflective practice. I started this as a candidate for National Board

Certification and it never stopped. Highly accomplished educators are teachers who, "think systematically about their practice and learn from experience" according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Consider when that happens: In the shower. Waiting to fall asleep at tonight. In the dentist's office. In the line at the grocery store. While cleaning the rabbit cage. In the car on the way to school. While on vacation and doing everything possible not to think about school. While listening to a speaker at a symposium. Our teaching, our classrooms, and our students are never far from our minds. It's hard to turn them off. We read something in the newspaper, see something in the store, or

experience something worth sharing and what do we say? It could use that with my students. In search of teaching excellence and student success, we are always hungry.

In truly accomplished teachers, there is something more than a hobbyist's passion at work, however. A professional educator establishes structures for reflection and revision of practice -- he is a reflective practitioner. He is not afraid of what such scrutiny might reveal. Mistakes are not so much weaknesses as they are opportunities. Those opportunities can only be realized, however, if the teacher thinks systematically about her practice and learns from her experiences.

What form might such systemic reflection take?

A personal journal that reflects upon the actions, people, and decisions of the day

Videotaping oneself and analyzing the tape privately or with a colleague

Informal and formal discussions with peers

Professional reading and discussion

Conversing on listservs

Team-teaching

Graduate work

Publishing reflective commentaries in educational journals (or writing letters to the editor)

Administrative reviews of your practice

Inviting student critique of your practice

Examining your practice in light of high teacher standards

Writing notes about a recently taught unit that you place in folder for reference when you teach the unit again

Observation of other teachers

Seeking the expertise and opinions of others

*Also this:*

At the end of important lessons or units completing a structured self-analysis with such questions as:

What worked? What didn't work? What will I do differently tomorrow as a result of what happened today? Whose needs are not being met? How does this lesson fit into the larger picture? Are the students building meaning for themselves or am I doing it for them? Is this material just 'fluff' or is it something useful to their lives? How intellectually rigorous is this? How can I tell the students are learning? Were the students prepared for this lesson? Why or why not? What will I do differently the next time I teach it?

In so doing, accomplished teachers demonstrate the very things they wish to inspire in their students. Such teachers are curious, tolerant, fair, and respectful of diversity. They demonstrate the abilities to problem-solve, self-analyze, take multiple perspectives, take risks, be creative, and adapt. Professional decisions are based on purposeful reflection, personal

principles, training, and experience. They practice what they preach about lifelong learning.

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Although there are many great ideas in the book, I think that the biggest challenge I see for myself is to start doing the daily reflecting Rick talks about. I know that when I do journaling about other things, it makes me a better person. I think that reflecting about my teaching would make me a better teacher. Rick, since I am such a "monkey see, monkey do" sort of teacher, can you give me an example (short) of how you do this?

Lori T

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 09:41:04 -0500  
From: Ellen Berg  
Subject: Re: Intro and gradebook/lesson plan book

> 'Anyone else create their own plan books and might be willing to share  
> their  
> format? -- Rick Wormeli

I've tried many things, but what works best is a spiral notebook. At the top I list the objectives and activities. With the remainder of the page I make notations for each class I have, journal style, with the date(s). It reminds me of adjustments we made or conversations/special needs of students. I'm wordy, so I need room.

Of course, all my classes don't follow each other exactly, but there is still space for each class linked with the objectives. If I need to add an activity to reinforce a concept, it gets added to the journal area with that day's date as well. It's kind of messy, but it works for me.

Ellen Berg

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 07:44:56 -0700  
From: Carolyn Beitzel  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

CRW Pup wrote:

>Should I implement a sign-out sheet,  
>as my mentor teacher did during my student teaching?

At our school everytime a child leaves the classroom they are "required" to sign out and then in with times. This is for security and safety. We have had some children unaccounted for during fire drills and such.

>For that matter, add to that the issues of pencil sharpening, getting a  
>tissue, whatever.

In my class this is done before I have "officially" begun. Once I or someone is talking then the kids have to wait until we do desk work (tissues they can get at any time).

I have also typed and copied a booklet that lists all the classroom procedures which is distributed the first week of class. We talk about it then as things come up we refer to it for the first month or so. If anyone would like a copy send a private email (it is in Word format). This idea came from Wong's book.

Carolyn Beitzel  
8th grade American History  
Beverly Hills Middle School  
Upper Darby, PA

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 08:04:14 -0700  
From: Carolyn Beitzel  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Matt wrote:

>We give them 3 minutes between classes, which is usually enough time.

Honestly, when is the last time you or a woman has gone to the bathroom, with books or bookbag, washed your hands and gotten to class in under three minutes??? (with time to spare for sharpening that pencil :) before class starts!) Think of the lines in women's rooms. Why do you think that is? What about "at that time of month?"

I think we expect way too much from social adolescents. Three minutes in my opinion is NOT enough time. That is our passing time as well, and if I insist that kids take care of business before they get to me then they are for the most part late. I would rather get them in on time, get them started on the days work, then let them go.

Carolyn Beitzel

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 11:17:53 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Rick's 4.0 grading scale

Hi All!

I was very interested in the 4.0 scale that Rick [discusses in his book](#),

but my district requires that we report grades numerically instead of A, B, C, or others ;)

Rick, you mention a conversion process for numerical or percentage grades in your "parent quick reference" - would you mind sharing it with us?

Anyone else use a 4.0 system?

Mendy Gannon  
Lady's Island Middle School  
Sixth Grade

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 10:20:50 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: Chapter on Teaming

After reading Chapter 7 on teaming, I have a few thoughts to throw out for comment. The chapter starts out with a team scenario where they use a large laminated calendar to list tests, quizzes, projects, conferences, etc. to remind each team member of others' assignments as well as to not overlap too much. I am the team leader of my team and I use a separate 1 inch binder with monthly calendars as well as the agenda and notes for each team meeting. It really does help to record what goes on in each classroom and it becomes the document you can refer to if a parent complains that there are too many things due on the same day.

Our 6th grade is structured to be all 2 person teams. The principal feels that we make more of a connection with just 50 students as opposed to a larger group of 75 or 100. It is a good idea, but it also limits the team sharing of ideas. Last year I worked with a first year teacher right out of college and to my delight we were the perfect "odd couple"! Our strengths and weaknesses really blend well. Obviously, she was just getting her feet wet last year, and this year we are raring to go! I'd love to hear about structures of other teams and what you do at meetings.

Paulette

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Date: Tue, 29 Jul 2003 11:24:06 -0400  
From: Heather Migdon  
Subject: Re: Possible consequences

I'm a great believer in the intelligence of children. In other words, many things kids will try to do (especially in DC schools), they know before they even meet you that they shouldn't do these things. But sometimes kids need reminders, and I understand that, so I use a variety of subtle and semi-subtle techniques (the "teacher look", walking closer to the child, corrective post-its, etc - with much love to [Fred Jones](#)) before I ever use my

back-up system with more formal consequences. That being said, I have no stated "warning." With my 4th and 6th graders, I found telling them "Okay, now it's a warning" to be completely ineffective. I let the kids know that they will know if they are doing something wrong, but I don't let them read from my playbook, so to speak.

My consequences are generally time out with written reflection (although I might drop the written reflection next year to make time out less a punishment and more "something everyone needs once in a while" - what do you think?), then no recess or 15 minutes after school, then phone call, then one hour detention after school on Friday. After the first eight weeks with (*lost text*)...

## **JULY 30**

There are 45 messages totalling 1916 lines in this issue.

Topics of the day:

1. Preparedness Mark
2. Intro and gradebook/lesson plan book (2)
3. Pencils and the bathroom....the bane of my existence!!!!
4. lesson plan books (2)
5. chapter 4--seating and desks (7)
6. Link to text of Rick's book
7. New teachers - ask your questions!
8. Procedures
9. seating and learning names (9)
10. Essential vs. Nice to Know
11. Classroom Rules (2)
12. Homework -- how much should it count? (2)
13. electronic grade programs & pictures
14. Re-taking tests and grading issues (10)
15. First days of school (2)
16. Beginning of year Assessment
17. Math Assessment

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 07:35:20 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Re: Preparedness Mark

My teammates and I give a preparedness and participation mark on a weekly basis. It counts for ten percent of their overall grade and it works like this:

Students earn up to a 100 points per week (20 per day on a five day week) For record keeping, we have what we call the "magic clipboard" and students start off with their daily allotment of points. They lose points for not having materials, and for being off task. We weight our



grades, so the 10% comes from the average of the nine weekly grades.

We keep the clipboard sheets in a binder, so we have a weekly picture of each child's week in class -- were they prepared? Talking? Daydreaming? Drawing? If the behavior doesn't stop with the notation on the clipboard (and we stole this idea from someone on the list!) we conference with the child and have them sign the back of the sheet. If someone is having a bad week, we touch base with the child and the parent.

The kids actually named it the "magic" clipboard as all one of us has to do is pick up our boards and look -- and magically students are on task . . . :)

Mendy Gannon  
Lady's Island Middle School  
Sixth Grade

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 08:08:00 -0500  
From: "Rick S."  
Subject: Re: lesson plan books

Rick

I know that in our district, the principals are required to view our plans weekly. It is actually in their ratings that they have done this. I just do my plans for them and as they change through the week, they just change.

~Rick Speigner

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 09:47:11 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker  
Subject: chapter 4--seating and desks

Thanks for all of the [seating arrangement options](#), Rick! I'm excited to try many of them and see how they work in my classroom space. I really like your point about minimizing back rows...I think that's so important for all students.

My arrangement for starting the school year is similar to your Senate, with 6 rows of 4 desks each, three rows on each side of the classroom, all angled toward the front of the classroom where most of the action happens with the whiteboard, overhead, maps, etc. It works well because I can see everyone's faces and is easy for group work with different students.

In my classroom I have 24 student desks that are often seen in elementary schools (chairs not attached, desks with storage space). Now that we are going to be a middle school and changing classes, I'm wondering how to h

andle this. A few questions about seating...

After the first couple of weeks do you have assigned desks for the students for each period (my homeroom class would since they would be there for reading and social studies and the desks would contain their supplies)?

I am concerned about the supplies in the student desks 'disappearing', regardless of how many times we discuss the importance of keeping hands out of the desks. The past two years we have been switching for science and this has been a bit of a problem. Any suggestions?

Thanks!  
--Carrie :)

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 10:32:38 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: lesson plan books

Hi Rick -- Yeah, I realize that. It's too bad those in positions to make decisions above those decisions made by principals see this sort of thing as helpful. I'm glad there's flexibility in your class, school, and district to allow for those changes. It's a drain on your time to submit them and it cause some undue anxiety, but at least your folks are realistic. There are many schools, however, in which teachers are admonished if what they teach doesn't match what they wrote down for the principal for the week. 'Gives me the willies... (spelling?) -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Rick I know that in our district, the principals are required to view our plans weekly. It is actually in their ratings that they have done this. I just do my plans for them and as they change through the week, they just change.  
~Rick Speigner~

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 10:44:33 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: chapter 4--seating and desks

Hi Carrie -- Yes, I assign seats. Every time I think students are doing well enough to choose their own seats and I let them, I regret it. Then I come across as wishy-washy if I keep changing them. Although I reserve the right to do that, I try not to do so. Determining the assignments takes time, but it's worth it. As I mention starting on page 55 in DOAB, I seat them boy-girl-boy-girl and it calms things quite a bit. I also spread out those students who might be management issues as well as my students who are models of appropriate behavior and I fill in around them as the chemistries seem to fit. I change seating arrangements at least once a month to keep

things fresh and not too territorial. Changing seats often helps those students who are struggling to make sitting next to someone they don't like possible -- they realize it's temporary.

I know this is going to sound weird, but when I've taught in middle schools in which the classroom desks were like the ones you describe (with storage spaces in the desks and students move from teacher to teacher for each subject), I turn the desks around so there is no access to the storage space. Students can handle their one or two periods with me without having to store items in the desk. Of course, we have lockers in these situations, but I've also used storage cubbies along one wall. This way I can move students into flexible groups whenever the lesson calls for it without students feeling like someone is sitting in their spot. Yes, we have anchor seats or home base in each class to which students return but their minds are open to shared space this way.

In my son's school (he's in 6th grade and it's housed in an elementary school), they keep the desks as normal and just track who sits where and if anything is stolen or damaged, the children who sit in that desk during the day are interviewed by the teacher. I guess I'd rather they spent time on other things. - Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Thanks for all of the seating arrangement options, Rick! I'm excited to try many of them and see how they work in my classroom space. I really like your point about minimizing back rows...I think that's so important for all students.

Thanks!  
--Carrie :)

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 11:46:35 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: chapter 4--seating and desks

I also turn my tables around so the cubbies are not easily accessed. This cuts down on the amount of extra junk students bring to class since there is no where to put it, and it cuts down on the garbage left in the cubbies for me to clean out (YUCK!). Even my homeroom kids do not store items in the cubbies long term. They use their lockers and the bothering of other's materials is eliminated.

I try to change seats every 2 weeks. I vary the method - usually I choose but on occasion I allow students to choose or use a random assignment method (playing cards or computer generated). The difficult but one the students appreciate: I have them anonymously write up to 3 people they would like to sit by, and ONLY 1 that do not want to sit by. I then very laboriously use this info to create a seating chart. It is time consuming so I usually on do

this maybe twice a year but the kids are usually very happy in these seats and I leave them there a longer period of time (until the talking issue becomes a problem - I warn them the first day that "their" seating arrangement is in jeopardy - the next time the class is chatty, I do not say anything, they just have a new seating chart when they arrive the next day.) Kids like to change seats often - we do lots of group work with "your table mate" so I like them to experience a variety of partners. It is more work on my part but they enjoy the changes and there is little complaining since, yes, they know it is a temporary placement.

Cossondra George

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 13:44:17 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker  
Subject: Re: chapter 4--seating and desks

I turn the desks around so there is no access to the storage space. Students can handle their one or two periods with me without having to store items in the desk.

This is an issue in our building because it is a temporary housing for fifth and sixth grade middle schoolers there are no lockers. :( There is remodeling going on at the current middle school and we will be there next year, with lockers, thank goodness! I have a closet in my classroom where students will keep their bags, jackets, etc, but their supplies will be stored in their desks. I have turned desks around for students who have difficulty concentrating on the task at hand so that thought crossed my mind. I was just wondering if it was worth the time and effort.

In my son's school (he's in 6th grade and it's housed in an elementary school), they keep the desks as normal and just track who sits where 20

I agree...I'd rather spend my time on more worthwhile things than tracking students at desks!

--Carrie :)

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 13:54:41 -0400  
From: Carrie Becker <  
Subject: Re: chapter 4--seating and desks

Even my homeroom kids do not store items in the cubbies long term. They use their lockers and the bothering of other's materials is eliminated.

Since we don't have lockers we don't have that option. :( At least not for this year...

I try to change seats every 2 weeks. I vary the method - usually I choose

but on occasion I allow students to choose or use a random assignment method (playing cards or computer generated).

How do you do random assignment on the computer? I haven't done that before, but it sounds like it would be interesting to try. I always place them myself and mix up the kids so they aren't with anyone they were in a group with for the last time.

The difficult but one the students appreciate: I have them anonymously write up to 3 people they would like to sit by, and ONLY 1 that do not want to sit by. I then very laboriously use this info to create a seating chart.

I have done this as well, but you are right, it is time consuming. And it's always hard when you can't grant everyone's wishes. I do my best to, though! I've never done the "ONLY 1 that do not want to sit by" I can see where that would be good, too.

--Carrie

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 14:10:53 -0400  
From: Matt  
Subject: Procedures

Carolyn, I'm curious about your classroom procedures booklet. I have considered creating one for this year to hand out, giving students all the information (ok, MOST of the info) they need to understand what to do and when to do it. Such as:

- \* What do I do when my pencil breaks?
- \* What do I do when I have been absent?
- \* Am I allowed to use the dictionary?

Etc, etc, etc.

Is there any way you can share your booklet/list? If not, perhaps a summary of the procedures you clarified in it?

Thanks

Matt

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 14:05:53 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: chapter 4--seating and desks

Carrie asked: How do you do random seat assignment on the computer? I haven't done that before, but it sounds like it would be interesting to try. I always place them myself and mix up the kids so they aren't with anyone they were in a group with for the last time.

We use a software program for grading that generates seating charts complete with pictures.

Pretty cool actually - I know some of the other electronic grade books do this also -

Cossondra George

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 14:34:35 -0400

From: CRW Pup

Subject: seating and learning names

Along the line of seating and the beginning of the year:

I put a little twist on the "alpha order" thing. I generally have difficulty learning names, so I used a strategy last year that I found very effective - I had just about all the names down within a week, and many within the first 3 days, which was quite an accomplishment for me. I seated them in rows (like someone else in the chat, I find that type of linear arrangement most helpful to my recall as I'm a very spatial thinker), but here's the twist - I seat them in alpha order by first name. That way, if I blank out on someone's name but remember that she's between Ahmad and Alex, then I can usually come up with the right name (it's gotta be Aimee, not Kelly). :) It's also a good intro to scientific thinking; I say something like, "A significant part of science is looking for patterns. Who can figure out the pattern behind the seating arrangement?" They've already figured out that it's not traditional alpha order, because some of them are thrilled not to be where they thought they'd be (in the back, or in the front, depending on last name). Last year I got a few incorrect guesses before someone hit on it.

The second thing I'm doing is new this year, so I don't know how effective it is. I'll report back to the main list sometime in September. I got a list of my students for this year from the guidance department, and then made copies of last year's seventh grade yearbook pictures (I teach 8th grade) and made flash cards of my incoming students. I'm going to see if I can use the flash cards in my remaining month of freedom (er, I mean, "long-term curriculum planning time") to learn some names and faces before they even walk in the door. I remember being so impressed by a college professor who used this trick and called each of us by name on DAY ONE! I don't know if I can do THAT (he had a lot fewer students than I will) but I can certainly facilitate the September learning curve for myself.

Liz

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 14:45:59 -0400

From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

These are terrific ideas, Liz! Knowing a kid's name right away is very endearing to students. It's like learning someone else's language -- Students feel respected by you. They feel like they belong and that they are important enough to have their name remembered by this new teacher. Good luck with the pictures and memorizing -- let us know how it goes. Thanks for sharing these!  
-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 14:58:54 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Essential vs. Nice to Know

My goal this year is to increase student choice and differentiation in my classroom, and to do this, I need to be able to sift from the vast wealth of historical knowledge the essential information/understandings separate from the "nice to know" information.

My question is this: those of you already doing this -- how do you go about it? How do you determine "the essential"? Anything you could share on your process would be helpful to me.

Mendy Gannon  
Lady's Island Middle School  
Sixth Grade

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 12:05:21 -0700  
From: Joanne  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

> These are terrific ideas, Liz! Knowing a kid's name right away is very  
> endearing to students. It's like learning someone else's language --  
> Students feel respected by you. They feel like they belong and that they  
> are important enough to have their name remembered by this new teacher.  
> Good luck with the pictures and memorizing -- let us know how it goes.  
> Thanks for sharing these! -- Rick Wormeli

I, too, love the idea of getting the class lists ahead of time and referring to last year's yearbook. In my last school, we didn't get our class lists until 24 hours (or was it less? hmmm) before school started. It was treated like some kind of state secret or something. I am going to ask this year and see if, in my new district, it is possible to get even a tentative list of class members. This is such a good idea, I'd love to do it, too. And if the class list changes somewhat? No problem, I will just know a few extra names

and faces. Can't hurt, can only help.

Joanne

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 12:08:45 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

I have read most of the posts on classroom rules and how, where, when, how often etc. do we handle situations like bathroom trips, pencil sharpening, throwing trash ..... As you gain more experience, you will learn that not one approach will work for a long time with middle school students. Some times you will need to change the procedure more than once in a given school year. Kids wise up and always find ways to bypass the rules or twist them to suit their needs.

The key, in my opinion, is to stay one step ahead of them and change the process before it gets out of hand. One year requiring the students to sign out on the chalkboard to leave the room was sufficeint. On the other hand, the following year, I had to ask the students to sign-out on a form I kept track of and on the board. Yet another year, each had a bathroom pass good for 3 trips to the BR each six weeks. We must be very flexible as we all know and always maintain a sense of humor and an open mind. Think of it this way:

Imagine yourself at a staff meeting and you must excuse yourself for a short pause to the BR. Your principal requires all teachers to ask for permission. So you ask and she/he responds with "Do you really have to go now? Can't you can wait until the break?" Food for thought.

Melba Yvette Smithwick  
Campus-Based Staff Developer  
Corpus Christi ISD

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 15:13:26 -0400  
From: CRW Pup  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

At 12:05 30/07/2003 -0700, Rick wrote:

>

>I, too, love the idea of getting the class lists ahead of time and referring  
>to last year's yearbook. In my last school, we didn't get our class lists  
>until 24 hours (or was it less? hmhhh) before school started. It was treated  
>like some kind of state secret or something.

Caveat - I did not get the \_class lists\_ - our district also waits until the last moment to give us those. All I got was a list of all the kids in my house (our school is so gargantuan that we have 5 houses to divide it up a bit). So it's all 130-some kids, but NOT broken down by class.



Liz

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 12:29:27 -0700  
From: Carolyn Beitzel  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

CRW Pup wrote:

>I seat them in alpha order by first name.

And here is a twist - have the kids determine the lineup and that way you can also get one of those icebreakers out of the way.

I am definitely using this. I too have such a hard time with names. It took me almost two months before I could figure everyone out. Very embarrassing.

Carolyn Beitzel

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 15:58:02 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Classroom Rules

Melba -- 'Very provocative and accurate.' Thanks for saying this. Sometimes we find the ways we treat students unacceptable for interaction with colleagues, yet we do it anyway. Most of our interactions are basic courtesy among humans, not something one does with adults and not with children. Thank you for reminding us of that very bottom line -- our relations with one another, no matter the age or experience.  
-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 15:58:05 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

Hi Carolyn -- Could I put in a plug for anti-alphabetical order? :-) As someone with "W" as the starting letter of his last name, I can attest to how old it gets (really fast) to always be seated towards the end and in a far away seat, to get supplies last, etc. You can also still see things alphabetically if students are seated anti-alphabetically. 'Just a thought for me and particularly for anyone with the last name, "Zyrckle." :-) -- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 16:48:49 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Homework -- how much should it count?

Just a quick poll -- I just finished rereading Chapter 8 - [dealing with homework](#) - and I'd like to know how much you guys count homework in your overall grade.

Thanks for sharing. :)

Mendy Gannon  
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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 17:17:53 -0400  
From: CRW Pup  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

At 15:58 30/07/2003 -0400, you wrote:

>Hi Carolyn -- Could I put in a plug for anti-alphabetical order? :-) As  
>someone with "W" as the starting letter of his last name, I can attest to  
>how old it gets (really fast) to always be seated towards the end and in a  
>far away seat, to get supplies last, etc. You can also still see things  
>alphabetically if students are seated anti-alphabetically. 'Just a thought  
>for me and particularly for anyone with the last name, "Zyrckle." :-) --  
>Rick Wormeli

Rick - that's the beauty of the alpha-by-first-name system - unless a kid is named Zach Zygote, or Alan Aardvark, etc. etc., they're probably going to get seated differently from the way they're accustomed to under alpha-by-last-name rules. I find it more useful than using last names because I'm not calling them by their last names. I can learn those after a week or two or three. I think Carolyn was talking about using the first-name method instead of the last-name method.

Liz  
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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 17:46:49 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: electronic grade programs & pictures

RE: pictures in electronic grade programs

They are put in the system by some higher power - I think.... not sure, but with our school pictures, comes the downloadable picture disk that is then easily out into the program. Actually I never gave much thought to how the pics got there, I just know they are there - oh the things we take for granted, eh??

But it is cool - nice to print for subs.

Cossondra George

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 18:12:20 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

Hi Liz -- You're right, she was talking about the first name method, not the last name. I missed that in the original post. I'm reading through too many at a time, I guess. :-) The first name method is a wonderful approach and it should take care of the end-of-the-alphabet-woes I mentioned in my e-mail. Thanks! - Rick Wormeli

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 19:34:19 -0400  
From: Eileen Bendixsen  
Subject: Re: Homework -- how much should it count?

At 04:48 PM 07/30/2003 -0400, you wrote:  
>Just a quick poll -- I just finished rereading Chapter 8 - dealing with  
>homework and I'd like to know how much you guys count homework in your  
>overall grade.

In science it is 10%. In math 20%. This is decided by the person writing the curriculum, but we had quite a bit of talk about lowering the math to 10% this year. It is inflating grades of some students.

Eileen

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 19:10:20 -0400  
From: Isabel Wiggins  
Subject: Re-taking tests and grading issues

My question for all of you is how to afford a "second chance" to those who score poorly on tests.

I teach 7th grade math to heterogeneous groups of students--yes, I'm striving to differentiate. There are a significant number of students who function reasonably well with day to day classwork, homework, quizzes, investigations, etc., but don't score well on a chapter test.

In the beginning of this past year my policy was no retakes. Then I was persuaded by a class discussion (and my own doubts about my policy) to permit students to retake tests. After all, learning is continuous. Who's to say that they can all learn the material by an arbitrary test day. Teachers in earlier grades had the policy of "correct your mistakes and earn half credit". I thought this was too easy, so I added

another step. In order to earn half credit for an item missed on the test, the student had to: 1) write the correct answer to the original problem, and 2) answer a similar question correctly. I thought the second step would "prove" that the student now understood whatever it was that caused them to get the item wrong on the test. In that sense, it worked well. However it created lots of extra paperwork from me--creating alternate test questions, keeping track of whether the student made the correction AND answered the alternate problem correctly.

I tried to use the policy only for students who scored below 80% on the chapter test, but many students who scored well (ex: 97%) demanded the opportunity to get the 98.5%. I felt like I had opened Pandora's Box.

So...my question to the group is how do you handle students who want to retake a test?

I read in Rick's book about some marking periods when he had as few as 3 grades to average. I've been trying to collect more and more grades thinking that the final average is more stable. I'm also in a quandary about grading with differentiated assignments--one student pointed out that if she had done "that other assignment" instead of the one she was assigned (an enriched version) she would have had an A+, so she she was being punished for being smart. ????

Looking forward to hearing the wisdom of the group...  
Isabella Wiggins

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 16:44:05 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Isabella, I did pretty much what you've described. I allowed my students to retake exams even those who scored in the 90s. However, I added an extra step. At the bottom of their page, I required for them to explain to me the types of errors they made and how they were able to correct them. What did you do wrong to get this grade? How did you correct the problem? Many times they just make calculation errors. I truly believe that students do learn at different rates and who's to say that they are all ready to test at the same time. For that reason, I let them retake tests anytime they requested it. Yes, I had a lot of paperwork, but after awhile, it actually decreased. Students began analyzing their mistakes before turning in their tests. We also practiced analyzing their errors during homework/classwork checks.

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 16:48:40 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: seating and learning names

I once had a teacher who sat us according to academic averages. The higher the

average the further back you sat. My average was between a 98-100 in eighth grade science. Roger Hammonds and I battled for 1st or should I say last chair every week. I never got grades like that in any other science classes after that year. Not a good idea for the kids in the front, though. I would not recommend it, but I thought it would y'all another perspective.

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 19:54:14 -0400  
From: Heather Migdon  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Rick (and others),

I often hear that teachers should work on procedures and classroom community for the first six weeks of school before introducing new material. While I agree with the sentiment, I have yet to see it in practice. What does six weeks of teaching without academic instruction look like? I've seen long lists of recommended first day of school activity and ice-breakers, but I'm looking for something more cohesive. Anyone have a start of year unit (or something similar) that could be adapted for kids as young as 4th grade? (Keep in mind, many of the kids will not be reading that well)

Thanks!!!

Heather

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 16:54:42 -0700  
From: Joanne  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Since mastery of a concept is what our goal is, it makes sense to me to allow retakes on exams. I would do as Melba said..... rather than giving the student another, similar problem, I believe I'd rather see the student analyze the error in the math problem and provide the correct answer. In language arts, perhaps the student could quote the comma rule or tackle an essay question again. I'd have to think about that one. However, if mastery is our goal, then I believe we need to do all we can to help our students achieve that.

Joanne

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 17:06:48 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Heather, Founta and Pinnell's [Guiding Readers and Writers](#) has the first 20 days of school already planned for reading teachers. They also explain each day. Our LA

teachers use this. It will work perfectly with your 4th graders, even the struggling readers. The book is full of wonderful ideas, lessons, activities and provides step by step instructions on the reader and writers workshop. Worth looking at.

Heather Migdon wrote:

Anyone have a start of year unit (or something similar) that could be adapted for kids as young as 4th grade? (Keep in mind, many of the kids will not be reading that well)

Thanks!!!

Heather

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 20:27:33 -0400  
From: Heather Migdon  
Subject: Re: First days of school

I love Fountas and Pinnell, but I would not start their 20 day plan the first week of school. Do the teachers literally start using it day one?

Heather

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 20:31:36 -0400  
From: Heather Migdon  
Subject: Beginning of year Assessment

One of my principals let me know that this year, she will want a class roster with their "grade levels" in reading and math. Her example was like "Suzie is at a 3.4 grade level in reading and a 4.2 grade level in math." I have ideas about how to get specific reading grade levels, but math? I'm clueless. Does anyone know an assessment tool that gives specific grade levels in math?

Heather

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 20:50:18 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

For my 7th graders' math tests, I do allow retakes but in order to retake the test, you must attend a review session (I try to schedule one during student lunch and another after school) That way I know the students are prepared, or have at least had the opportunity to have their questions clarified. I then give the new test either at lunch or after school for full credit.

Cossondra

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 17:53:35 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: First days of school

Sure do. We had 90 minute classes. This year we are back to 55 minutes, but will continue with reader/writers workshop.

*Heather Migdon wrote:*

I love Fountas and Pinnell, but I would not start their 20 day plan the first week of school. Do the teachers literally start using it day one?

Heather

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 22:38:04 -0400  
From: azteacherldy  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

In my reading classes I give Vocabulary Tests every other week. I do allow students to re-take them (however it's not exactly the same test). It always amazes me of the many students who score low on the first test, don't take the time to study the material and then re-take the test. Especially when I tell them that I'll take the better of the two scores.

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 23:01:35 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

This is a terrific idea, Melba! I'm going to have my students do this at the bottom of their papers as well. Reflective analysis of one's own work -- what a helpful tool to them as students. You're right, too: The paperwork does lessen quite a bit with redo's. -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

From: Melba Smithwick  
Sent: Wednesday, July 30, 2003 7:44 PM  
Subject: Re: [MWBOOKS] Re-taking tests and grading issues

I did pretty much what you've described. I allowed my students to retake exams even those who scored in the 90s. However, I added an extra step. At the bottom of their page, I required for them to explain to me the types of errors they made and how they were able to correct them....

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 22:58:57 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Hi Isabel -- These are terrific questions, ones that many of us revisit every year. Your rationale for allowing students to redo tests, projects, and other assignments is sound. I agree, though, if we start putting in too many steps for redo's, it gets to be a lot of paperwork. My students can do redo things only with a parent signature requesting the redo.

Why do some teachers only allow students who scored average and poorly to redo tasks for a higher grade? Is it in deference to those who scored well the first time around? If that's the case, then we're using grades for something other than their intended purpose. Why do we give grades -- to reward? to bribe? to create worry/fear? to document deficiencies? to indicate where a child is in relation to standards set for the assignment or grading period? to make instructional decisions down the road? Grades are often arbitrary and more subjective than we'd like to believe they are.

If the grade we give a student is supposed to be a valid indicator of what students know and are able to do, why would we not allow them to earn the highest possible grade? A student gets a 97% can get a 100%, if he wishes. I don't see the down side of this. It's much easier to accept this if we fully embrace the idea that different individuals learn at different rates and different ways, and they demonstrate mastery in different ways as well. If a student is sincerely trying to learn and wants to improve a fraction or a whole lot more, who are we to stop them? If a student is acting immaturely and blowing off the hard work necessary for mastery, then we refuse his request to redo the test or assignment. Everything is "at teacher discretion," an idea I make very clear at the beginning of every year.

Students get this. They appreciate that we allow them to redo until they succeed, regardless of the initial attempt's grade. Of course they have to maintain the current work as well as the redo work and that can be hard. Many don't choose to redo beyond the first quarter, they just do a better job of their first attempts. We can't differentiate and be truly for students' success but then pull them up short by saying, "You can only achieve to this lower level (less than an A or an averaged grade) because we have to honor your classmates who understood the concepts earlier than you."

If you recall in DOAB p. 76, I mentioned that I had only three grades by the 7th week of a 9-week grading period, and I was okay with it only because those grades were compositions of many different elements coming together and being assessed. This isn't the norm for me, but it has happened. I add a few a more grades by the end of the grading period, totaling about six to eight grades. This seems like a good minimum amount of grades needed to draw a valid conclusion about students' achievement. There have been times when I've had many superficial grades by that 7th week that haven't really



indicated what students know and are able to do, and I've had to change that before the end of the grading period.

As far as your last quandary goes, remind students that they are to mark their progress against their own development and the standards, not others'. Provide her many different assignments over the year in which she can choose which assignment to do. Remind her that what is fair, is not always equal, and your goal is fairness. When you do enriched assignments, make sure to provide the student with ample opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the essential and enduring knowledge and obtain the appropriate grade for just that material, in addition to anything beyond it.

By the way, is it okay to stop at an "A" as the top grade? What messages does it send to allow "A+" and what message does it send to let the highest level of proficiency be just an "A"? It may only be in my experience, but I've found most students who are pushing for the A+ and who express anxiety over not achieving it are missing the point of school, learning, and life. An A+, if it is used, should not be about, "Well, there goes my average" if they don't earn it. The focus should still be: What did I learn and how did I make it meaningful in my life? It's so easy to catch a ride on the grade myopia train that we forget to keep what's important in life important. I could be way off on this, of course. 'Anyone else have a comment on A being the top grade or an A+ being the top grade?

Thanks again, Isabel, for these provocative and realistic questions!

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Wed, 30 Jul 2003 23:48:59 -0600  
From: Brenda A Dyck  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

I allow math retakes on unit finals. In fact I strongly suggest students to do a rewrite on any test score less than 70%. When I taught S.S I did the same. It's in keeping with my teaching philosophy: "Teaching Until They Get It". I believe that sometimes we stop teaching too soon, that some students need more exposure to certain concepts. If they have this opportunity, many kids who fail will succeed.

Like Cossondra I require the students to go through a rework process (come in for one lunch hour tutorial and do a homework assignment designed to help you practice the skills). As I tell the kids, "If you keep doing what you been doing, you'll keep getting what you got" unless you come for extra help and then practice that "new found understanding". Rewrites are a natural part of my classroom culture, they are not dreaded and the students don't feel embarrassed when they need to do one. Oh...and I don't average the original test mark and the rewrite mark.

- Brenda

## JULY 31

There are 33 messages totalling 1478 lines in this issue.

Topics of the day:

1. Another take on retakes (5)
2. seating and learning names
3. Natural consequences-help needed (3)
4. lesson plan books (3)
5. Re-taking tests and grading issues (3)
6. Reply to Matt's questions
7. power of verbs
8. substitute plans (2)
9. lesson plan books - substitute plans
10. Teaming
11. To rehash a test or not (8)
12. To rehash a test or not - clarification (2)
13. Marzano's books
14. Grading

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 06:28:51 -0500  
From: "RATZEL, MARSHA"  
Subject: Another take on retakes

I was wondering what you might think of something that I've done in the past. I've required students to "qualify" to take the test. It's sort of a pre-emptive retake system. By qualify I mean, students have to show me that they are ready to take my assessment.

That might mean completing a study guide, a mini-conference with me or even participating in a class discussion...many, many different forms. When I become convinced they know their stuff, then I "let" them take the quiz or test. If they aren't ready, then they come in for extra study sessions held during Team Time or the structured study halls, I might partner them with a peer tutor or have them re-do the prep work necessary to be ready. I guess I have sort of viewed this more like you would preparing to take the driver's license test.

It's really worked for me. And, I know this isn't what we're talking about, when I partner this with pre-assessing and testing out of units if you already know the material, I feel like I'm getting closer and closer to getting students to focus on learning rather than just the grade. (It's probably because I'm an easy grader in that if you know the material, I give an A no matter when you learned it.)

Redoing daily work is a whole other matter. In this arena I'm pretty rigid because once I know what a student is capable of producing, I try to hold them to their personal best at all time. A qualifier....if there's something going on that would really hold them back like personal stuff or they're sick....then I modify to fit the situation. My parents have been

very supportive of this and when I work closely with them, they are a great source of help in getting kids to work closer to their potential. Parents are delighted when I talk about this at Back to School Night and call me to make sure they're helping. Only a few do the work for their kids and usually I can get those parents to see that really they're shortchanging their kiddo if I teach them how to help their student without doing it. Typically after mid-September, most students give up and really work up to their personal best because they'd rather only have to do the work once!!!! The ones that don't probably need the extra love and support anyway, so I don't mind working with them to learn how to hold themselves to that standard. I won't say that I can get all 120 kids on a team to always do this, but I am amazed that a big majority do buy-in.

marsha

**Editor's note:** Marsha Ratzel's teaching outlook [has changed a bit](#) since 2003.

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 08:16:08 -0400  
From: Isabel Wiggins  
Subject: Re: Another take on retakes

Thanks to all who have replied to my original post yesterday about allowing students to retake tests. I am sorting through a lot of philosophical issues behind the daily routines and am very grateful to have found this listserv (the main one and this one). You've given me lots to think about. (I taught for 16 years, then took a break for about 15 years, and am now teaching math again. I love it!)

Marsha, I was interested in knowing more about your mention of "redoing daily work". Are you saying that you permit/encourage/demand redoing daily work it its not up to the student's personal best? Specifically what suggestions do you give parents to get kids to work closer to their potential?

Isabella Wiggins

RATZEL, MARSHA wrote:

>Redoing daily work is a whole other matter. In this arena I'm pretty rigid because once I know what a student is capable of producing, I try to hold them to their personal best at all time....

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 06:34:13 -0700  
From: Carolyn Beitzel  
Subject: Re: Another take on retakes

Marsha, in real time what does this look like? For example, if I am teaching a unit on the

Constitution and I have it planned for 10 days with an assessment on the 11th. How does your idea fit in? Keep in mind that on day 12 I have to move on to something else.

Now, of course, this is rigid and I am more flexible in real life. But, I am not grasping how some can be ready and some not and what are you doing with them all at the same time? If say 5 are ready to take the assessment and the rest are not, what do you do with those 5 as you are still teaching the others? Is there a deadline on your assessment or is it an ongoing forever kind of thing? What if someone is never ready?

COuld you please give me an actual scenario where you used this. Thanks.

"RATZEL, MARSHA" wrote:

I was wondering what you might think of something that I've done in the past. I've required students to "qualify" to take the test. It's sort of a pre-emptive retake system. By qualify I mean, students have to show me that they are ready to take my assessment....

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 10:08:51 -0400  
From: morton  
Subject: Natural consequences-help needed

Love the book, Rick; I am looking forward to trying to get across the power (and concept) of verbs by having students try to converse without them---what a great idea.

I've especially taken note of the "Consequences" postings in this week's discussion since that is where I need the most help. I'd like to go back to that thread, if you don't mind.

I need ideas for suitable consequences; what was the buzz phrase a few (well, maybe more than a few-time flies) years ago? Was it natural consequences? The idea that the "punishment" fits the crime. I do miss my memory :). Rick had some in his consequences reply to Heather and I'm hoping for some that fit this situation.

Anyway, here's the scenario and the problem that is bothering me the most:

I teach an almost totally self-contained 7/8 class in a very small school so I have all my students for two years. My question centers around a boy who'll be in 8th grade this year; last year he was, and this year he will be, the overall brightest student in the class. He would be a model student (interested, articulate, does excellent work, loves to read) except for one thing: he cannot keep his mouth shut when it comes to the activities of other students-he always has a remark about their deficiencies. If someone answers or asks a question, he has a snide comment about what they said or how they said it. If someone shares information about their activities, he interrupts with some kind of put down, etc., etc., etc.

We've discussed it, he agrees that it's disrespectful to the others, but he continues to do the same thing. Actually, I think the agreement is just lip service and that he has no intention of changing his behavior. Notes on progress reports and report cards explaining this as the reasons for his check minuses in respect, etc., aren't making a difference either.

If I can't turn this around somehow, I expect the situation to be worse this year as the incoming seventh grade will give him lots of fodder.

Is this a situation where writing down what he did, should have done, will do in the future to regain our trust would be of any help? And, if so, how many times would you do the writing thing before trying something else? And what would the something else be?

The especially aggravating thing about this is that the whole school is supposedly zero-tolerance for any type of harassment. We've had to do a lot of educating about what constitutes harassment; as you know, generally perpetrators don't see this or ijust teasingi as harassment. But what is a suitable consequence for this type of harassment?

Thanks,  
Margaret

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 11:30:15 EDT  
From: Rjpjpp  
Subject: Re: lesson plan books

I have found having to submit the lesson plans each week to be very cumbersome. Last year was my first year as a teacher and it was so hard to find the time to do everything. Having to have those plans on the principal's desk each Monday a.m. was one more thing to worry about. I ended up doing my best to have 5 days of plans written and then falling back on my system of rewriting/erasing as the week progressed. The principal's rationale for these lesson plans is that if I have an unplanned absence the substitute will have lesson plans to follow. However, since mine change so much this really won't work for my classes. You can almost be assured that by Wednesday or Thursday I have strayed from what I turned into the office. How does everybody else plan for substitutes? I'm planning on preparing a "Substitute Folder" with lots of procedural info and emergency activities. Can you give me some ideas for what I should include? I have a 6 year old and a 4 year old and I'm already worrying what I'm going to do when/if they get sick this year. Luckily, my husband can help on some days if they are sick but I know there may be times that I'll have to be out with a sick child.

Thanks,  
Jacqueline

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 08:31:48 -0700  
From: CWK  
Subject: Re: Another take on retakes

Marsha!

What a thoughtful and wonderful assessment process. You are truly a teacher who uses assessment to support student achievement rather than to sort them into groups of can do, can't do and won't do.

I would like to share your message with two groups of teachers I will work with this month. I would like to make you come alive for them by describing you, your students and your school. If you are comfortable with this please contact me at cwilsonk@pacbell.net. I will not give them your email or any information that would be intrusive.

Carolyn Wilson Koerschen

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 12:40:23 -0400  
From: Matt  
Subject: Re-taking tests and grading issues

I have also struggled with the re-take issue. On one hand, I'm very big on students being responsible and prepared the first time around. If they know the retake option is there, they are likely to not put forth their best effort the first time. On the other hand, there are the students who do try their hardest and still fail to grasp certain concepts.

In the past I occasionally offered retakes. I allowed students who scored below 70% to retake, but they had to come in at lunch or before school or whenever as long as it was not during class time. I then averaged the two scores together.

The recent postings have me really thinking on how to handle this issue. I agree that the student who scored 93% should be allowed to retake if the student who got a 53% is allowed. If the first student wants to do even better, than who am I to stifle their interest?

However, they do need to have some accountability. I think the compulsory attendance at a review session is a great idea. You can't just show up and do a retake, you have to do something first that demonstrates your commitment. Otherwise 100 kids might show up for the retake just to get out of something else.

My questions are these:

What do you do after kids take the first test, but before the retake? Do you hand back all the tests and go over all the answers?

How do you design the retake in relation to the first test? I often find it

difficult to write the original test, much less a second version that isn't simply a reshuffling of the first. What's the best way to do it?

Matt

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:22:07 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Another take on retakes

MARSHA - Wow, this is a great idea -- the qualifying pre-assessments. Does it take more energy, time, and paperwork to pull it off, or is it about the same? -- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:22:10 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Natural consequences-help needed

Hi Margaret -- This is a great question. I hope others will chime in when they get a chance. They may have already, but I haven't read all the postings yet today.

Potential responses for students who chronically put down others and make snide comments:

1. Videotape him and watch it with him privately helping him to analyze his effect on his own learning and that of others -- invite parents to join the conversation and viewing
2. Removal from social situations ('my last choice, a still a choice)
3. Have him read and reflect on multiple short stories and novels about kids who are different and how they have to struggle with individuals who put them down or with their own negative behavior. I highly recommend *The Acorn People* (Jones) and *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelson), among others.
4. Use simulations for character education or teacher-advisory times in which he is at a disadvantage to others, but also make sure at some point he is in an advantaged position and must make helpful responses.
5. Service learning -- find something in which he interacts with disabled individuals or even abled individuals but he can only succeed if he is sensitive to others.
6. Team-building activities, such as Ropes Course or Project Adventure activities (Kendall-Hunt has great books on this for schools and camps)

7. The written analysis of his behavior that you mention and we mentioned earlier will work. Make sure to focus on the section on how he is going to rebuild the class's trust each time he breaks it.
8. Ask the student what would work
9. Behavior modification plan -- He gets points toward something desired for each period he's courteous. ('A next-to-last choice for me)
10. With parent permission, talk with his coaches, pastors and/or rabbi's about the problem. Have all the adults in his life be on the same page with helping him.
11. Cultivate a strong relationship between him and one particular adult in the building if it's not you. That adult can mentor him through this.
12. Counseling sessions with someone in your guidance department (if you have one) that might help him see that he can be accepted and even thrive without interacting so negatively.
13. I also recommend the book, What To Do With the Kid Who by Kay Burke (Skylight Professional). It has many practical strategies for teaching kids just like this.
14. Consistently applied and clear punishment for each time the student makes such a choice to abuse others.
15. If it's serious enough, invite the parents to get him a physical. At least then you would know if it is a manifestation of ADD or Tourette's Syndrome, or if a change in diet would help. For example, a lot of proteins for breakfast has helped unruly classes settle down and attend to learning (Pat Wolfe, Brain Matters, ASCD, I believe). The proteins increase the brain's production of serotonin and dopamine which help with mental acuity and being well reasoned.
16. Maturation. Some kids go through a rough couple of years but they finally grow a bit and get tired of always cutting down the world. It takes tenacity and patience on our part and the parts of his classmates, but time to grow is a part of it.

'Anyone have other ideas? -- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:42:22 -0400  
From: Isabel Wiggins  
Subject: Reply to Matt's questions

Matt,

This year, once I started the retake policy, I just handed back tests without going over every problem. I found the students were happy about



that--going over every problems can get long and uninteresting to those who had the problem right on the test (even for some who had a lot wrong). I learned that no one really valued going over the test, except me.

To make corrections, students could work on their own (only a good idea if they just made careless errors), with a parent, friend, or me. Some really diligent ones came in for help before school or at lunchtime. In my school, 8:00-8:20 or lunch hour are the times for extra help. Some who relied on help at home came in for the alternate problems with more wrong answers as corrections. I like the idea of having one or two review sessions at set times.

To make the alternate test questions, I basically altered the numbers in the problems or asked a question a slightly different way. Remember, I teach math--this method probably wouldn't work for history or English. Then I directed them to do the problems numbered the same as the ones they had missed on the original test.

I did not require retakes and there were students with low grades who weren't interested in the retake process at all. Have to find another way to reach them.

The retake process probably benefited about 20% of my students, so it's definitely worthwhile. Some of the most motivated test retakers were those who scored 88% to 95% and wanted every point they could get. But why not let them?

After reading the replies to my question, I'm still struggling with giving them full credit for making corrections. I know with my own children, I am appalled when they can get 10 extra points for having a test signed. I will admit to letting students whose parents requested a complete retake take a similar test and only including the better test in my gradebook. Typically, this was a student who really "blew" a test--someone who generally was a B+ student who scored a 30%, for example. Even with earning 1/2 credit they would have only had a 65%.

The whole grading thing is very murky.

Isabel Wiggins

Matt wrote:

>

>My questions are these:

>

>What do you do after kids take the first test, but before the retake? Do you hand back all the tests and go over all the answers?

>

>How do you design the retake in relation to the first test? I often find it difficult to write the original test, much less a second version that isn't

> simply a reshuffling of the first. What's the best way to do it?

>

>

> Matt

>

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:37:31 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Rewriting a math test is perhaps easier than some other subjects because I can essentially just juggle the numbers around. I usually have a Test A and a Test B version anyway since my kids sit at 2 person tables. If this is the case, the student just takes the other version. Also, with math, even if it is the same test, the student still has to understand how to solve the problems. I require them to show their work, obviously, anyway. I also liked the idea of explaining your mistakes...

Cossondra George  
Newberry Middle School

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 12:55:04 -0500  
From: Lori  
Subject: power of verbs

Margaret wrote:

Love the book, Rick; I am looking forward to trying to get across the power (and concept) of verbs by having students try to converse without them-what a great idea.

Our Title teacher had students work in groups to rewrite The Three Little Pigs without using verbs. Got the point across, and they came up with some really funny stuff.

Lori

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:02:49 -0500  
From: Lori  
Subject: substitute plans

Jacqueline wrote:

> How does everybody else plan for substitutes? I'm planning on preparing a

"Substitute Folder" with lots of procedural info and emergency activities. Can you give me some ideas for what I should include?

In 4th and 5th grade, I had a sub box that had worksheets that covered every subject area. In my sub folder, I told the sub to totally ignore my regular plans and to pull whatever they felt comfortable doing. The sub folder contained my schedule and important information about the school and specific students. That way, I didn't have to come in if I was unexpectedly sick. This worked well for true teachers. However, I had "babysitters" that pulled every worksheet in the box and expected the kids to do them on their own. In spite of the fact that the sub plans explicitly told them NOT to do this and that they needed to go over things with the kids.

I am intrigued with Rick's idea from the book of having projects that the students can do in the sub folder. I'm going to look into that further this year.

If I knew I was going to be gone, I wrote out very detailed plans, and left the books and materials on my desk with the plans in the order that they would be needed.

Lori

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 13:05:59 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Re: lesson plan books - substitute plans

>>>>>I'm planning on preparing a "Substitute Folder" with lots of procedural info and emergency activities. Can you give me some ideas for what I should include? I have a 6 year old and a 4 year old and I'm already worrying what I'm going to do when/if they get sick this year. Luckily, my husband can help on some days if they are sick but I know there may be times that I'll have to be out with a sick child. Thanks,  
Jacqueline

Jacqueline,

I have a binder behind my desk that is labeled SUBSTITUTE SURVIVAL KIT in large letters. It has the following information, prefaced by an introductory letter:

Contents of the binder:

1. "Teacher Pack" - Pens and pencils for your use, band-aids and cough drops, stickers for the children, behavior referrals, "caught being good" certificates, change for the drink/snack machines (located downstairs of the main office)
2. A/B Calendar
3. Class/Duty Schedule
4. General Policies/Map of School
5. Discipline/Reward Suggestions/Magic Clipboard
6. Blue Card/Class Rosters-Seating Charts/Class Descriptions and

Special Notes

7. Lesson Plans by Day

8. Emergency Work/Plans

I've created a substitute version of my "magic clipboard" weekly grading system, and it has greatly improved my communication with my substitutes.

I'd be happy to send you a copy of anything you'd like if you send me a note offlist.

Mendy Gannon  
Lady's Island Middle School  
Sixth Grade

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 14:40:25 -0400

From: Rick Wormeli

Subject: Re: substitute plans

Hi -- Page 151-152 of Day One and Beyond has a list of what should be in those sub folders. Submitting your lesson plans every week just so principals have plans to give subs in case we're gone as was mentioned in one of the earlier postings is really, really frustrating. It's very insensitive to teachers. As long as we have a few days' worth of emergency sub plans on file at the front office, we're fine. The principal's better use of time is helping teachers or departments identify what would make for successful, stand alone, sub plans that are substantive -- that result in teaching, not babysitting, students while the teacher is away.

I like Lori's ideas below. We can spend a half a day or one evening putting together great sub plans regarding our subjects and then breathe easier the rest of the year. We know those plans are there, but we don't use them, if we can help it. I've had some emergency sub plans go unused for five years straight because I was always able to prepare something for students related to the current lessons and get them in to school, even if I was sick. Each of those years, I just glanced through the emergency plans to make sure they were still up to date and the ready to go. I didn't have to reinvent anything.

-- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Jacqueline wrote:

> How does everybody else plan for substitutes? I'm planning on preparing a "Substitute Folder" with lots of procedural info and emergency activities. Can you give me some ideas for what I should include?

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 11:41:09 -0700  
From: LINDA WHEELER  
Subject: Teaming

"In your first year of teaching, try to do one successful integration with one other teacher in the first semester. Working with more than one teacher may be overwhelming as you try to master curriculum and discover your professional self (Wormeli, p.113)."

I will be a first year teacher for an ESL pull-out program. This means I'll be working with the 7th and 8th grade teams for all subjects. I realize the importance of working well with both of these teams, and the support that can be found in good collaboration. Also, good collaboration with the teams is critical in order for me to best help the ESL students to be successful and included in the mainstream.

I'm looking for any advice anyone has to offer. Also, I would appreciate any helpful feedback from classroom teachers regarding what they like to see most in a resource teacher.

Thanks,  
Linda

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 14:17:54 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: To rehash a test or not

Isabel wrote. . .  
"going over every problem can get long and uninteresting to those who had the problem right on the test (even for some who had a lot wrong). I learned that no one really valued going over the test, except me."

This is an interesting comment and a dilemma I have struggle with also. I guess this is a practice that I've come to adhere to through the years, but is it really necessary? I always assume that students want to know what the right answer is if they get it wrong, but maybe they don't. I don't always give retakes in English class, but when I do the retake is different from the original. It sure would save a lot of valuable class time not to go over a test. What do the rest of you do?

Paulette

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 16:09:38 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

Hi -- Please don't give up on giving students feedback on tests. The positive effects are worth it. Just make sure it's timely. Robert Marzano (in Classroom Instruction that Works, ASCD) shows a positive effect size of 0.78 if classmates give students feedback, 0.83 if the teacher gives feedback. An assignment's (or a test's) positive effect size is only 0.28 if there is no feedback.

Here's the kicker in this: 0.25 effect size is instructionally insignificant, 1.0 is maximum positive impact. **We're wasting everyone's time, ours included, to give students assignments, tests, projects, etc. for which there is no feedback.** Every time we design a test or an assignment, then, we have to plan how we're going to give feedback in the same planning breath. If we stop giving feedback on tests, we miss a major opportunity to teach. We can find compelling ways to give students' feedback.

Getting back to feedback's timely nature, my students put more of themselves into their tests, projects, and assignments when they know they are going to get it back within a day or two or three. When the assignments, projects, and tests are so long that I can't get them graded and returned for a week or more, they don't put in as much effort and depth. Consider shortening tests, projects, and assignments in order to maximize feedback's impact.  
-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 16:41:46 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

Rick - by feedback, do you mean that each test should be gone over in class, or can corrected tests, complete w/ comments on mistakes work?

I too struggle with using class time to go over a test but I take a real effort not just to mark wrong answers but give "feedback" on an individual basis on the returned papers. I also make the effort to always return papers the next day and I do allow time for questions and we go over any specific questions students may ask.

Are you saying it is more effective for student learning when we go over it again as a class?

Thanks for the clarification - I got a bit lost in your answer for some reason!

Cossondra George

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 15:48:21 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

Thanks Rick for affirming what my gut instinct was originally telling me. Timely feedback is definitely worth the effort. I actually have Marzano's book on my pile of "to reads" before school starts. You've just given me an incentive to pick it up! I'm loving all of this discussion this week! Thank you!

Paulette

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:08:31 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

Hi Cossondra -- Yes to your first question. We need to find ways for students to understand their errors and to improve their mastery. If we give tests, return them with grades, but offer no opportunities for students to interact with errors and misconceptions, then the impact of the assessment as an instructional tool is significantly diminished. Good assessment instructs, and good instruction assesses. They're inseparable. (I apologize for repeating this -- I know you know this already. But it may be helpful to someone....)

Assess comes from "assidere," which means, "to sit beside." Assessment is a coaching/nurturing tool, not stop-everything-and-test tool. We can live up to its promise by always making sure we have a way in which students get feedback on their products -- tests included. There are creative ways to review homework assignments, tests, and other student products in class that aren't just asking students to compare their papers with the answers posted on the overhead.

As far as whether it's done individually or with the whole class, I agree it's hard to figure out how to do it. If we go over the whole thing and only a few students really need it, then we're wasting time. In those cases, I would do an anchor activity with the larger class and pull those students who need more specific feedback out of the anchor activity for a while to review it with them.

I think we need to facilitate formal interactions between our students and our written comments on tests and assignments, otherwise they are not considered. Most of my students look at the grade only and don't really reflect on that hopefully cogent comment in the margin.

So what do we do to get them to reflect on those comments? How about choosing two comments to which they write a response back to me? How about asking students to share

with one another how they would improve their understanding of the topic if they had a chance to do it over? How about requiring students to redo or rewrite whatever it is they missed correctly as homework? If it's a lot, they only have to do three? 'Just brainstorming here. The bottom line is to not leave it to students' own maturity to seriously consider those comments. Given their busy lives and many and alternative priorities, they most often will not reflect on the feedback. As the adults in their academic lives, we have to prompt them to do it.

Does this makes sense or did I confuse things further? I'm good at that.  
:-)

- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:11:36 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

Hi Paulette -- Thanks. Marzano's book is a terrific read! A number of schools use it as a book study. The handbook that you can get to go with it is full of practical materials, too. Not to add more to your plate, but he has a wonderful new one along the same lines: What Works in Schools (ASCD, 2003). It has the research and practicalities of several other school factors besides instruction, but he also has more on instruction. It's gets better and better, eh? :-) -- Rick Wormeli

-----Original Message-----

Thanks Rick for affirming what my gut instinct was originally telling me. Timely feedback is definitely worth the effort. I actually have Marzano's book on my pile of "to reads" before school starts. You've just given me an incentive to pick it up! I'm loving all of this discussion this week! Thank you!

Paulette

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:22:40 -0400  
From: Isabel Wiggins  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not - clarification

Rick,  
Just to clarify...

I write personal comments on each test paper and get them back to the students the next day usually. I also allow a couple of minutes for



the kiddos to look over their papers and ask me questions individually (as I circulate among the desks). They can see me after class for a more in depth conversation. I just don't work out the answer to every question on the board. But I'm open to another way to do it.

Isabel

Rick Wormeli wrote:

>Hi -- Please don't give up on giving students feedback on tests. The  
>positive effects are worth it. Just make sure it's timely.

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:30:28 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not - clarification

Hi Isabel -- This sounds great. Some times they might benefit from a more formal interaction, but I often do exactly as you describe here. It's effective. For those that don't have time, courage, or inclination to see you for more in-depth conversation and they really need it, how do you facilitate those conversations happening?

I agree that doing every problem or question response for every test is worth the time. Having students confer for a few moments in small groups and have each group choose two questions or problems for class discussion is one way to narrow the focus.

FYI: I'm checking out for a few hours to run some errands, but I'll be back later this evening. Keep the great ideas flowing. I'm learning a lot!

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:43:04 EDT  
From: PStef  
Subject: Re: lesson plan books

I have taught in several different schools and each administrator has his/her own requirements for lesson plans. There is some truth about having them prepared for substitutes. However, I believe the real problem is the fact many teachers "wing it" every day if they do not have mandated lesson plans. That makes for a really long day and very unorganized classroom. And the most important thing is that the discipline problems rise sharply if the teacher is unorganized.

The school in which I am teaching now does not require lesson plans each week. There are maybe a few weeks in the year that we have to turn in lesson

plans for "documentation". I will say though when I taught at the schools that required them each week, I was much more prepared. I am in my 13th year now and I automatically write my lesson plans. It just keeps me organized. They may not "look good" but they serve the purpose.

As for substitute folders -- they are a life saver. I write and save a generic letter on my computer explaining my schedule and rules such as going to the bathroom, to the library, to the locker..... Then, when I know who my sub is I go in and add anything I need that particular sub to know. For emergencies, I compile worksheets and such in a folder and keep it in the same place all the time. Then when I call a sub for that emergency I can tell them where to look for the folder. I leave a copy of the letter in that folder too. I don't have a problem getting subs because I always keep things prepared for them, even in emergencies.

The last thing you need is to worry about a sub when your children are sick.

Good Luck

Marilyn Stefani  
Surfside Middle School

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 16:54:16 -0500  
From: "Rick S."  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

Isabel  
What I do is let them correct the test. Any question they get correct on the re-do earns them 1/2 of the points that I took away originally. I also do not let them earn any more than an 80 after corrections are added to the grade from when they took the test.

~Rick Speigner

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 16:59:25 -0500  
From: Paulette Romano  
Subject: Marzano's books

Rick,

The handbook with practical materials sounds like a great accompaniment. Actually, my principal bought both Classrooms That Work and What Works in Schools for the whole faculty to read this summer. Hearing your seal of approval validates it even more in my eyes. I have grown children and can spend a lot of time on my own professional development (which by the way is neverending!). I don't know how teachers with young families do it!

Paulette

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 18:05:53 -0400  
From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

Much clearer - thanks Rick...

I like the idea having them respond to my comments - I often also wonder if they ever take the time to read them, especially those marginal students who really benefit from feedback. This would assure they have looked the test over and reflected not only on their mistakes but my hints of what went wrong and how to show improvement - maybe I can combine the redo and respond to comment/reflect on mistakes.

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:17:29 -0500  
From: Nicole Foster  
Subject: Re: To rehash a test or not

How about passing out the test, giving the students a few moments to look at your comments, and then ask them to tell you what number they want to go over with you?  
Nicole Foster

Isabel wrote. . .  
"going over every problem can get long and uninteresting to those who had the problem right on the test (even for some who had a lot wrong). I learned that no one really valued going over the test, except me."

This is an interesting comment and a dilemma I have struggle with also. I guess this is a practice that I've come to adhere to through the years, but is it really necessary? ....

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 17:18:45 -0500  
From: "Rick S."  
Subject: Re: Natural consequences-help needed

Sorry that I don't have a viable solution. We just had an in-service where this was listed as a form of bullying. It should be addressed as such. If you have your principal's backing, I would send him to the office with a referral for verbal bullying. If the principal backs you in this and treats it as serious as it should be, he might even spend time in ISS if your school uses that. I think the referral would possibly show him the seriousness of his offense as well as your stepped-up intolerance of his attitude of superiority. I would think that he really does not feel superior or he would

not need to lift himself up by putting other students down.

~Rick Speigner

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 19:03:36 -0400

From: winkler

Subject: Re: lesson plan books

You wrote: "I will say though when I taught at the schools that required them each week, I was much more prepared. I am in my 13th year now and I automatically write my lesson plans. It just keeps me organized. They may not "look good" but they serve the purpose."

We photocopy our plan books every two weeks, but it's done at the END of the two weeks. I, personally, don't feel that it is demeaning when done that way since there is no pressure to worry about how my plans may change during the upcoming week from what I "said" I would be doing; by the time they are turned in the plans have obviously already been through the revision process (and they look it!). It's not a perfect system; in fact, I think that once a month or every 9 weeks would suffice. But I find value in the process.

I've spent hours today updating my planbook template in MSWord; otherwise I just cannot stand all the time it takes to personalize all those blank squares week after week after week to suit my quirks. D

Joyce

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Date: Thu, 31 Jul 2003 23:43:23 -0400

From: Matt

Subject: Grading

I read the section in Rick's book on grading tonight. Another thing I have been wrestling with is how to come up with the final grade. Should I use total points or average various weighted categories? I have gone with the categories method thusfar, but I've really been thinking about going with total points. My first two years I weighted tests 35%, homework 35%, projects 20%, and journal 10%. Year two changed slightly, and last year I went with Tests/Projects (combined) 50%, homework 40%, Participation 10%.

What do you think is better, overall points where each graded assignment is given a selected number of points where the grade is determined by points received vs. points possible, or is going with weighted categories better?

Those of you who use total points, how do you decide how many points to allot for each graded item? How many points is a test worth versus a daily homework assignment?

I'm not just asking this of Rick, but everyone. Which method does everyone use?

Thanks

Matt

## **AUGUST 1**

There are 18 messages totalling 806 lines in this issue.

Topics of the day:

1. Grading (10)
2. grading systems (2)
3. Grading and Knowing My Audience
4. Giving students choices
5. Natural consequences
6. Re-taking tests and grading issues
7. Thanks Rick
8. Thanks and Farewell

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 07:28:05 -0400  
From: Mendy Gannon  
Subject: Re: Grading

I use weighted grades, partly because I've never been able to figure out how to do a point system ;)

I have changed my weights over the years I've been teaching, and this year they will be:

Participation/Preparedness 10%  
Homework 20%  
Papers/Projects/Performances 35%  
Quizzes/Tests 35%

Mendy Gannon  
Lady's Island Middle School  
Sixth Grade Social Studies

-----Original Message-----

I read the section in Rick's book on grading tonight. Another thing I have been wrestling with is how to come up with the final grade.....  
Matt

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 08:45:00 -0400  
From: rick winkler  
Subject: Re: Grading

> "Should I use total points or average various weighted categories? I have  
> gone with the categories method thusfar, but I've really been thinking about going with  
> total points.  
>  
> What do you think is better, overall points where each graded assignment  
is given a selected number of points where the grade is determined by points  
> received vs. points possible, or is going with weighted categories better?"

Interesting, because that is exactly my situation; for the last two years  
I've used weighted categories, but have been seriously considering switching  
to points this year. One of my main reasons is that it would allow for  
students to much more easily track their grades (and use math skills in the  
process), instead of having to rely on the "magical" computer or lengthy  
manual calculations. Not that I try to emphasize GRADES, but there is no  
way to avoid the issue, either.

I use Gradekeeper; it allows for both methods and is simple and adaptable.  
Last year I updated and printed out the gradebook on weekends, then entered  
the next week's directly on that printout; it eliminated having to keep a  
manual gradebook. But I ended up using a lot of paper over the year.

If I switch to a point system, I'm thinking of going back to a manual 3-line  
page I designed, on which I can easily/quickly manually enter, tally points,  
track attendance. Then those points can easily be entered into Gradekeeper.  
Sigh. That is double-work, but I really like sending at least 3 progress  
reports home for parent signature each 9 weeks.

So I, too, am curious to hear the pros/cons of weighting vs. total points.  
Also, what do you think about offering a few points (5-10) for students who  
have parents sign their progress reports and return them by the deadline?  
In the past I've offered it as homework points, but in thinking it through,  
isn't that a valid assessment for preparedness?

I found the entire conversation about retaking of tests to be excellent!

Joyce  
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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 07:31:14 -0700  
From: Carolyn Beitzel  
Subject: Re: Grading

Joyce, you bring up several valid points of which I too have been struggling with. I have  
been doing exactly as you with weighted categories and have found that it is difficult for  
the kids to maintain their own gradesheet when there is lengthy calculations involved. So  
I am going to try total points this year as well.

I am curious about your 3 line gradebook, can you explain it more? I have seen 2 lines where you have the points on the top line then a running total on the next.

I also use a computer grade program and found that I was using TONS of paper as well. For me I don't think keeping a manual book is extra work as I did that before - I would print out the blank gradebook with assignments from the computer and as I graded the work put the grade onto the manual sheet and then inputted it into the computer once a week.

I don't think there are really pros and cons to either, just a personal preference. YOU can still weight your assignments using total points. For example if your tests were weighted 40% of the entire grade then multiply the points by four. Or you can make the total points for any assignment the weight, for example if tests were 40% then have the test equal 40 points, homework 20% or 20 points. By earning more points it automatically gives it more weight. I am sure there are others who have a different system. I hope they share.

Carolyn Beitzel

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 10:41:39 -0400  
From: Isabel Wiggins  
Subject: grading systems

Thanks, Rick, for the ideas for student reflection on test comments. I found the entire discussion to be very helpful.

I'm also interested in the weighted grading vs student points out of total possible points grading system. I, too, plan to switch to student points out of total possible points system. It seems easier to communicate to the parents and students and easier for the students to keep their own tally. The weighting is actually built in by the number of possible points given to any assignment. For example, if a substantive project or test is worth 100 points, quizzes and smaller activities might be worth 50 points, and homework 10 points. Other assignments done in class in the process of learning and understanding concepts might be worth 20 or 25 points. Figure out what assignments are in a typical marking period (i.e. 100, 100, 100, 50, 50, 50, 50, 25, 25, 25, 20, 20, 20, and 15 homeworks (10 each)). In this example, the total is 810 points. The 100 point assignments (presumably tests or large projects) represent 37% of the grade, the 50 point assignments represent 25% of the grade, the 20/25 point assignments represent 20% of the grade, and homework represents 18% of the grade. So you can embed a similar weighting scale into this system by selecting relative point values.

Well, didn't mean for this to get so long and detailed...

Isabella Wiggins

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 08:24:45 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: Grading

I've been around for a very long time, actually able (but not gonna) to retire this year. I have tried weighting tests, 25%, 40% etc. Our district even required us for a few years to weight performance standards assessments 50% and even that was futile.

I have come to the conclusion after 29 years of teaching 6th graders that they don't really understand the weighting and the only people who care and become frustrated are the parents and the teachers. Total points works best in our neck of the woods. Our district has revamped the grading policy once again and we are back to total points.

Most of our teachers base most grades on 100%. Some start with 0 points and kids build up to them, some start with 100 and deduct, and some award less than 100 per assignment, build up from there or categorize each assignment, get an average and average all categories. The key to students' success is to post their averages weekly, teach them to review them each week, stay on their case and communicate with their parents often.

Melba Yvette Smithwick  
Campus-Based Staff Developer  
Corpus Christi ISD

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 10:25:23 -0500  
From: Lori  
Subject: Grading

And, then, to add another monkey wrench to the works...A question that has been buzzing around some people in my district, do you give the student the average or what they're truly achieving at the end of the grading period. If you had a kid that just didn't get place value, for instance, and scored low on some assignments at the beginning of the grading period, but really gets a handle on it at the end and truly understands it now, do you consider those early assignments? It sure seems like there are way more questions than answers for me these days!  
Lori

----- Original Message -----

> I read the section in Rick's book on grading tonight. Another thing I have been wrestling with is how to come up with the final grade. Should I use total points or average various weighted categories?

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 11:25:53 -0400



From: Cossondra George  
Subject: Re: grading systems

I simply grade each assignment as a percentage grade and record it as such. Then daily work counts as a single grade, quizzes as double, tests/major projects as triple - it is easy for the students to understand and average their own grades. It is easy to use in PowerGrade or when calculating long hand. It makes tests have more impact than a homework assignment - at the beginning of any project I let the kids know what weight the grade has.

Cossondra George

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 08:33:37 -0700  
From: Melba Smithwick  
Subject: Re: Grading

Lori, in my opinion, what you decide to do with your student's grades is up to you. Why not give that child a quiz or another assignment based on the same material they did early on when they did not score well again and replace those grades? Or you could simply not count the first few assignments students do when learning the material for the first time. I always waited until I felt the majority if not all of my students had learned the material before I even considered taking a grade. We need to give our students time to make mistakes.

Some teachers, new and experienced, think that if the kids do the work then it should be recorded. Not true; not everything needs to go in. All work counts, it's just a matter of where the final grade ends up. Kids always ask, "Will this count?" My response has always been, "Does it matter? Will you not try your best to do this right? I expect your very best effort every time you do something for me. If you make a mistake or more, it's OK, but it's not OK to do less than your personal best."

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 11:48:07 -0400  
From: Bill Ivey  
Subject: Re: Grading

On Friday, Aug 1, 2003, at 11:24 America/New\_York, Melba Smithwick wrote:

- > The key to students' success is to post their averages weekly, teach
- > them to review them each week, stay on their case and
- > communicate with their parents often.
- >

Hi!

Nicely summed up. During the final month of school this year, I

designed a form to help my students review for the final exam. It began with some reflective questions along the lines of:

1. What are my strengths in French?
2. What skills do I need to improve in French?

just to get them thinking.

Then, each night, they had to fill in a three part form along the lines of:

1. What are my three goals for the evening (what three things do I want to learn more solidly)?
2. What specifically did I do to make progress toward meeting those three goals?
3. How much time did I spend?

I checked this form daily, and used it to stimulate discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of different study methods, how to determine when to keep plugging towards a goal and when to let it sit for a few days before coming back to it, long-term planning in general, and so on.

How well did it work? To be honest, it's hard to tell. The 7th grade class did a fantastic job, but then they often did. The 8th grade class had a hard time with grammar but had their vocabulary down - and that fit their pattern as well. But it did get a number of students reviewing for the final exam well before they normally would, and it did clarify for each student which methods of review worked best for himself/herself.

I was talking through the idea with our science teacher, and we both were asking ourselves - what if I had used this tool all year? So I'm putting the idea out here for your consideration and/or discussion. Has anyone done anything like this?

Take care,  
Bill Ivey  
Pine Cobble School, Williamstown, MA  
Stoneleigh-Burnham School, Greenfield, MA

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 13:04:27 -0700  
From: Laurie Wasserman  
Subject: Re: Grading and Knowing My Audience

Matt,

I teach 6th grade LD kids in Math, Reading and LA. Each subject is graded differently because I see them as "my audience" and I need to grade them

according to their educational and IEP needs.  
For example, in Math, they are graded this way:

Preparation/Participation 20%  
Binder 20%  
Tests/Quizzes 20%  
Homework 20%  
Projects 20%

The majority of my students do not perform well on tests, so I count the projects the same weight; this gives them an alternative assessment to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Like Brenda, I count being prepared with proper materials as crucial.

In LA I grade as follows:  
Essays 25%  
Spelling Quizzes 25%  
Novel Work 25%  
Classwork/Participation/Preparation 25%

In Reading:  
Quizzes 25%  
Projects 25%  
Classwork/Participation 25%  
Preparation 25%

I adjust the weighting depending on my class each year, and sometimes each term. As I get to know my students I may find I need to put more emphasis on being prepared, participating, etc.

Laurie

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 12:04:37 -0700  
From: Elizabeth Renaud  
Subject: Re: Grading

--- Melba Smithwick wrote:

The key to students' success is to post  
> their averages weekly, teach them to review them  
> each week, stay on their case and  
> communicate with their parents often.

How true! This past year our 8th grade class (students and parents) was notorious for claiming no one told them how bad they were doing. Fortunately, we added more progress reports, and had a couple of meetings with the kids and parents to inform them of their progress. The parents and students were

required to sign statements that they were aware of where they stood. We still had parents complain they never were told. Of course, the principal was then able to produce the signed documents, and that usually was sufficient.

However, we have been discussing how to get the kids to understand how they get their grades. So many times a kid will be failing, usually by not doing the work, then get motivated and do an assignment. Many times that assignment will be done well and a passing grade will be assigned. But then the kid is shocked when he/she finds out they are still failing. These kids are really in the moment. If one assignment is passing, then they are passing the class.

This next school year, our 7/8 team is going to begin to show the students how their grades are figured. Although, some teachers just do a quick example on the overhead and go on, I think I will make it much more hands on. I plan on having each of my students keep track of their grades and every week or two, actually have a time when they figure their averages. Hopefully, this will make it more meaningful for them. After all it is their grade they are figuring not some mythical example I give on the overhead.

I really think the key is "ownership". Finding a way to impress upon the students they own the grade. However, I have been impressed with the discussions related to re-tests, reflection on the work, etc. I've got to believe that we make gains in the direction of ownership when we teach kids how to make what they are doing meaningful to them. In addition to meaningful, engaged lessons, it is important to pull them in on the reflection.

I have always had conflicts with grading. I want to move my students beyond that letter they see on the report card to a deeper understanding of what they are learning and whether or not they are becoming proficient in what they are learning.

Elizabeth Renaud  
Fremont Elem.  
Alhambra, CA

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 15:17:41 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli

Subject: Re: Grading

Melba's right on many fronts -- as usual! :-) Teachers do it differently in every district. An underlying hope, however: That we'll help students focus on what they're learning, not on their averages. If we're going to stop and look at averages every week or two, let's give at least as much time to stopping and looking at all we've learned/mastered, too. Students need that big picture, and we can provide it. I don't think society is well-served to have grades as the soul indicator of school and personal academic health. I know we have to work in reality, but maybe we can change reality....

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 15:25:01 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Grading

Hi Lori -- Great question! Here's something that was hard for me to swallow at first, but then I grasped it and it made a lot of sense:

*Our averages of student grades are starting points.*

*The final grade is ultimately up to our professional opinion, not a mathematical calculation.*

If a student's work adds up to an A, but I can analyze his products against standards and see that they just don't add up to an A level proficiency, I'll give him a B -- as long as I can justify it. This is an extreme case, however. Usually a student's grades indicate his mastery clearly, but sometimes and for varied reasons a student squeaks through with a grade that does not reflect his mastery. If a student gets a B or B+ on his average, but really demonstrates masterful, A-level proficiency, he gets an A. It's not a fudge grade for his character or hard work, it's a serious contemplation of his mastery coming from a professional educator and subject expert -- the teacher.

If a student was struggling in the initial weeks of a grading period but then went on to master everything we studied that quarter and achieved A's on it, when I stop and assess him against all the standards for that quarter when I complete those report cards, he gets the highest levels he's achieved; he gets an A, despite his earlier struggles. This is only if he's gone back and demonstrated proficiency on everything in the grading period, of course. If he's received A's only the most recent material but it doesn't reflect his mastery of earlier studies, then we can't do this.

-- Rick Wormeli

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 16:26:58 -0400  
From: Juanita Edge  
Subject: Re: Giving students choices

Rick,  
On p. 177 you talk about giving students choices. For example, instead of requiring note cards for research you teach them six ways to take notes. Please describe the six ways.

Juanita Edge

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 16:56:29 -0400  
From: morton  
Subject: Re: Natural consequences

Hi Rick,  
Thank you for taking the time to write out such a long, detailed list of potential responses. I'm no longer fantasizing about dunce caps :) and time-outs with all these wonderful ideas to choose from.

Margaret

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 17:00:52 -0700  
From: fijifamily  
Subject: Re: Re-taking tests and grading issues

I've always taught my kids that what you learn is more important than what grade you receive, but sometimes it is hard to justify this way of thinking.

My 14yo dd took an advanced math placement course, worked her tail end off doing two hours of homework a day, plus working on projects over some weekends only to get B's all year, finally pulling it up to an A at the end of the year. Her G.P.A. for the year was something like 3.85 and she pointed out that had she taken a regular math course, it would likely have been a 4.0. She understands that she learned and did more than the other kids, but still didn't think it fair that her grades didn't reflect the harder work she was doing. She also wasn't invited to the end of year awards night. Was she basically being punished for being smart? Just what do grades really mean anyways? Roxanne in WA

> I'm also in a quandary  
> about grading with differentiated assignments--one student pointed out  
> that if she had done "that other assignment" instead of the one she was  
> assigned (an enriched version) she would have had an A+, so she she was  
> being punished for being smart. ????

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 20:56:42 -0400  
From: Isabel Wiggins  
Subject: Thanks Rick

Rick,  
Thanks for making yourself available for the chat this week. I've benefited from the discussion and your book is an inspiration.

Isabella Wiggins

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Date: Fri, 1 Aug 2003 22:33:34 -0400  
From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: Thanks and Farewell

Hi Isabella -- Thank you for your kind words and provocative questions. You were a terrific catalyst for our discussion. I look forward to our future conversations and all that I have yet to learn from you.

I'm still planning to respond to several of the book chat's e-mails, finishing by Saturday or Sunday morning at the latest. I hope John will keep the chat open until noon on Sunday, if possible, so I can get these last responses out. I haven't been too talkative this afternoon and evening because the PowerPoint slides for the NMSA Web casts on Day One and Beyond (one in September and one in October) were due today, and I've been trying to finish them. I'm just now finishing the slides on discipline, in fact.

In case some of you are off to vacation spots, starting the school year, and/or other great things, please accept my sincere thanks for participating in our conversations this week, even if you were just a lurker and thinker and never posted a message. I am more than honored that you would consider something I wrote as worth your time and professional discourse. A great outcome of this week would be the launch or reframing of your own ideas regarding our topics and the inclination to fully explore their potential in the coming year.

I'm especially indebted to those seasoned veterans who joined the chat and offered their wisdom. I know you're asked to share your ideas a lot, and sometimes it gets repetitive, but hopefully the dynamic is different enough with all these new folks who haven't had the privilege of your thinking to keep it interesting for you. You certainly were the tops of professional this week. I'm in awe of your skillful contributions to our profession.

To those of you who are new to middle school teaching: Thank you for choosing middle school teaching as the way to contribute your many gifts. As some strange person once said, you'll turn our bulwarks into cathedrals; you'll surpass what we've built. These are amazing leaders of tomorrow with whom you're working. What an incredible opportunity you have to shape all

that is to come. Those of us on the listserv and in middle schools around the world stand with you, ready to help. With so many folks ready to listen and guide, you're ready for day one and beyond. :-)

-- Rick Wormeli

**Messages Posted on August 2, after conversation officially ended.**

From: Dmsteach  
Subject: Re: [MWBOOKS] Thanks and Farewell  
To: MWBOOKS@MILEPOST1.COM

Rick,  
Thanks to you for sharing with us this week (and always). I know that your books will be in my classroom to be 'required reading' for any student teachers that I'll be having in the coming years.

Jeanie Dotson

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From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: [MWBOOKS] Meeting parent about grades  
To: MWBOOKS@MILEPOST1.COM

Hi Carolyn -- I'm deeply sorry that you have to go through such issues with this family. It would make some teachers gun-shy about recording anything less than good grades on the report card. Stand tough, as I'm sure you already do.

My first thought as I read your piece was just to let the parents vent. The second thought was that the administration should take this from your plate and handle it without your involvement. It's wise for them to contact you and hear your grade determination process, but beyond that, it's in an administrator's arena. Whatever happens, please have someone beyond the administration and the family there -- a teammate? a union representative? another teacher in the school? It's important that whoever it is does not come across as adversarial. This person should be there to document what is said and to make sure you had a chance to explain things with clarity, if needed.

It sounds like you've done everything you can for this family. If you haven't correlated the students products with the standards of excellence set for them yet, however, I'd do a few of those. Pull out (or ask them to bring in) tests, writings, projects, etc. and explain on a few of them how the students' product did not reflect anything higher than the grade he perceived. If he doesn't have the products to analyze, that makes your case, too. Such analysis is calm, rationale, courteous, and professional.

It sounds like the administration supports your position about not changing the grade, but I'd go in early and talk with him or her about how things are



going to be handled. For example, one of the principals with whom I worked asks teachers to minimize their talking and let him do the talking, if it's needed. He says that most angry parent meetings are mainly for the parent to vent and feel heard, not for me to defend myself. Because my principal was skillful with this sort of thing, I followed his advice and the whole thing evaporated after a day or two. If you've offered well-reasoned rationale for your grading decisions, the family's irrational response moves them and their and issues to the realm of dysfunction -- you'll never win. Don't give the discussion any more life when this happens by sticking around to discuss things further.

If it gets ugly, give one warning that the meeting will terminate if the family continues to be verbally and emotionally abusive of you. Presumably your administration will step in at this point. If the ugliness continues, end the meeting. Refer them to your school district's appeal process (assuming you have one), leave, and go to do something worthwhile the rest of the day. If the family makes disparaging comments about you to other parents in the community, you can file a claim against the family. That's a big set of emotional and legal hurdles, of course. Hopefully you won't have to choose such battles.

Whatever happens, remember the other families and children who find you very fair and think your approaches are solidly professional and sensitive. If not for you, their children would not have learned as well or at all. I know you're well grounded and this kind of thing probably won't shake you, but it can get a little weird at times and it's good to remind ourselves of our past, present, and future successes. Let us know how it goes. -- Rick Wormeli

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From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: [MWBOOKS] Perceptions of grades  
To: MWBOOKS@MILEPOST1.COM

Roxanne - Hi -- I know this is hopeful thinking, but the real bottom line for our children is that they are happy and find meaningful ways to participate in the world. That's it. In middle school, is it really that important that they take the advanced courses? Not really. One to two-hour pull-out programs once a week for gifted students don't result in meeting their needs (How the Gifted Brain Learns, David Sousa, Corwin Press, 2003). If the one you're talking about, Carolyn, is longer than that or every day, then it probably does. I think that students who have healthy attitudes and behaviors go a lot farther in high school and by virtue of that, farther in college. They're able to deal with life and they learn how to cope with struggle in a healthy manner. With our overscheduled lives in our society, the most loving thing we can do is not sweat the B's in advanced courses, or we can let them stay with the regular courses and get A's -- working with these teachers to increase the complexity (differentiate) as often as appropriate, however. The negative impact of massive amounts of homework on family relationships and personal growth alone is worth the reconsideration.

Look at your daughter's reason for getting grades: "...do not get the recognition they think they deserve in the forms of a higher grade." She already equates grades with who she is. Why do we perpetuate this atrocity? In Roxanne's example, her daughter thinks the brass ring is the higher grade and the end of the year awards night. She thinks 3.85 g.p.a. makes her less of a success than a 4.0 -- Does she know how subjective grades are? Where did we get on the train that said 4.0 was the only indicator of an absolutely fantastic person? I'll take a student with a g.p.a. of 2.0 and higher who is involved in service organizations, thoughtful academics, and with healthy family and friend relationships just as much as someone with a 4.0. We need so much more than academic knowledge and skills in our world. This is not devaluing hard work and advanced accomplishment, it's putting it in the long-term perspective.

Why do we do those awards night celebrations at the end of the year or quarter -- Do we really think they motivate those who attend and their uninvited classmates to do those same academic behaviors during the next grading period or year? I know I'm going "Alfie Kohn" on this, but the research is clear -- they don't result in such things. They are a detriment in the long run. They have no business being the goal for students.

If our kids' basic needs for humanity and learning are being met in a class that does not place undue burdens on their shoulders, then I'd opt for those regular classes over the honors classes. This is assuming, of course, that the teacher will differentiate for students. If the needs are not being met by the regular education teacher, then go for the honors classes but remove something else from your daughter's load. We can't keep adding. Remember that homework should not exceed one to two hours per night -- for the all the classes put together, not just for one class. Beyond that, the educational impact is next to nil and we're just creating resentment which will have more impact (negatively) than lack of homework. That's one reason we work on teams and try to coordinate homework.

I know this is hard. I worry about all this with my own children -- one of which is identified as gifted by the school district and one that is not, though both are wonderfully gifted in many ways -- Daddy bias coming through loud and clear. When I look at them and think about the goals I have for each of them, it's that they are happy, that they become good parents one day, and that they find contributing to the world and serving others their highest callings. The stresses of advanced coursework and grade myopia don't always lead to such aspirations.

-- Rick Wormeli

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From: Rick Wormeli  
Subject: Re: [MWBOOKS] Grading  
To: MWBOOKS@MILEPOST1.COM

Wow, Rick, you deserve the rest of the summer off. I hope your school year doesn't start until the end of August or beginning of September. Go do something with your family and let your mind roam. :-)

I really like your idea of recording attendance and other information on the same page as grades. It's all in one place. For those folks not using electronic gradebooks it might mean having two grade books in order to accommodate multiple lines for each of 180 students or so, but it would be worth it.

Thanks, Rick, for all your practical ideas and perspectives. You've helped many of us. -- Rick Wormeli

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From: Elizabeth Renaud  
Subject: Re: [MWBOOKS] Meeting parent about grades  
To: MWBOOKS@MILEPOST1.COM

Carolyn:

Nina wrote:

If another teacher also had similar experiences with this student, you might also ask that he/she be  
> included in the conference to back up your  
perceptions. Above all, don't  
> lose faith in yourself. It is simply not possible  
> to completely avoid all  
> confrontations.  
> Good luck!  
>

I wholeheartedly agree. We had a few parents that really gave us a hard time at the end of the year because we would not let the kid participate in the graduation ceremonies. As a team, we try very hard to have all the teachers the kid had in the meeting. Even one other teacher helps give credibility to the situation.

I also agree with Nina's suggestion you meet with the principal before the meeting. I have done that as well and it helps to have a game plan going into the meeting. One meeting we had with a mother and daughter, we had already decided we were not going to let the daughter in the graduation ceremony. She was failing two subjects. The principal let the mother talk until she was finished, and then proceeded to acknowledge what she said, but stood by the final decision and explained why she stood by the decision. Obviously, the mother and daughter were not happy, but let it end there.

Another parent went to the district office, but when the district office contacted our principal and heard the story, they stood by our decision to keep the student from participating in the ceremony.

I am in my 5th year of teaching and have learned quickly to keep a good record of work and grades, as well as behavior. I know you do the same. It really goes a long way when I present my case to the principal. Our principal is very supportive, but she definitely wants good documentation.

Like Nina said, we do the best we can do, don't lose faith in ourselves and keep moving forward.

You're in my thoughts, and I do wish you the best of luck on August 7.

Elizabeth Renaud  
Fremont Elem.  
Alhambra, CA

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From: Elizabeth Renaud  
Subject: [MWBOOKS] Perception of Grades  
To: MWBOOKS@MILEPOST1.COM

Rick:

Your message on grades was fantastic. Ever since I started teaching in the middle school I have believed I am teaching students and far more than just grades and at times standards. You said it far better than I could.

I printed your message to have something to think about and be able to talk to other teachers about this subject.

I want to echo others thanks for your time and experience. This book chat has been far more informative than most of my education classes. I truly appreciate your experience as well as everyone's experience and advice on this list.

Enjoy the rest of your summer.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Renaud

Fremont Elem.  
Alhambra, CA

***Final Editor's note:*** You can [buy Rick Wormeli's Day One and Beyond](#) at the 2012 price of \$18 at Amazon. After reading this transcript, we're guessing you will agree it's a bargain!