

6 Things You Must Do on the First Day Of School

by Michael Linsin

You have one opportunity to start your school year on the right classroom management foot, one shot to propel your first day of school into the best learning experience your students have ever had.

You can't afford to leave it to chance. You can't afford to be unprepared, uninspired, or unfocused. You can't afford to be anything other than on top of your game. For a lasting first impression will set the tone for the rest of the school year.

It will set the tone for behavior, work habits, respect, responsibility, camaraderie, and so much more. Thus, your first day of school should reflect your vision of a dream class. It should reflect who you are, what you expect, and what it means to be a member of your special classroom.

It should stir in your students the desire to become more or better or somehow different than when they walked through your door.

What follows are six things that, when infused with your passion and conviction, and sprinkled with a dose of your wonderful imperfection, will make your first day of school one your students won't soon forget.

1. Make a connection.

Building rapport begins the moment your students lay eyes on you. Greet them with a smile and let them know in no uncertain terms that you're glad they're a member of your class and now part of a unique community.

Your initial friendliness and open, welcoming heart will put them at ease and spark an immediate desire to please you, follow your lead, and pay forward your kindness throughout the classroom.

2. Set a tone of excellence.

After just a few introductory remarks, send the message that you expect excellence in everything they do by showing your students how you expect them to enter the classroom in the morning. Make it highly detailed, demonstrating every precious step.

This first routine, when taught with depth and precision, and then practiced successfully, paves the way for all other routines to be learned quickly and thereafter performed with excellence.

3. Have some fun.

Whether it's a getting to know you game, a rollicking story of your youth, or just your everyday humor, be sure your students see, and experience, that being in your classroom also means having fun.

It's key to not only their motivation and attentiveness and instilling a love for learning, but it also affords you the leverage and influential presence to ask for and expect hard work, respect, and kind behavior . . . and get exactly that from your students.

4. Make a promise.

By now your students will be buzzing with the understanding that yours is no ordinary classroom. The startling expectations, the joyful learning, and the quiet thrill in their heart is evidence enough that it's going to be a remarkable year.

They are now primed to hear from you a most important promise, a promise that will largely determine your and their success. You're going to promise them that you will protect their special community, that you will protect their right to learn and enjoy school.

5. Fulfill your promise.

When students understand its true purpose—that is, a safeguard against interruptions, disrespect, name-calling, etc.—your classroom management plan takes on a whole new meaning. Rather than being viewed as a negative, it will be seen for what it is: a means to preserve their love of school.

Teach your plan, not as a hard-edged disciplinarian, but as one who cares enough about their education to defend it to the hilt. Although you'll spend parts of the rest of the week modeling and practicing your plan, a detailed overview on the first day is a must.

6. Dive headlong into academics.

Establish from the get-go that your classroom is in the business of learning by diving into a challenging academic lesson (or two or three) on the first day of school. Be sure, however, that it's spot-on—high interest, participatory, leaving no doubt as to what you want your students *to know* and *to do*.

Their success understanding and then performing your first academic objective is crucial to their confidence going forward, setting the stage for limitless improvement.