

their classroom because they will not have had sufficient practice in or knowledge of how to sustain successful habits of scholarship.

While the techniques in this book make varying use of one or several of these principles (for example, technique 38, *Strong Voice*, is heavily focused on Control while technique 44, *Precise Praise*, is mostly about influence), the rest of this chapter focuses almost exclusively on Discipline and on the Systems and Routines that are the hidden foundation of any classroom culture.

### TECHNIQUE 28

#### ENTRY ROUTINE

The first routine that affects classroom culture is the one for how students enter. Like all others, this is a routine whether you realize it (and shape it intentionally) or not. Unlike *Threshold* (technique 41 in Chapter Six), which immediately precedes students' entry into the room and focuses on setting behavioral norms and expectations, **Entry Routine** is about making a habit out of what's efficient, productive, and scholarly after the greeting and as students take their seats and class begins.

A typical routine begins with students entering the room and picking up a packet of materials from a small table just inside the door. In some cases, especially at the lower elementary grades, packets might already be at students' desks. A couple of key points maximize the effectiveness of this part of the entry routine.

- It's far more efficient to have students pick up their packets from a table than it is for you to try to hand the packets to them at the door. That only slows you down and forces you to multitask when your mind should be on setting behavioral expectations and building relationships. It's also far more efficient to have students pick up their packets from a table than it is for you to try to hand them out to them later while they sit and wait for them.
- Students should know where to sit. Milling around looking for a seat or deciding where to sit or talking about deciding where to sit ("Can I sit next to him? Will he think I'm flirting?") are all examples of wasted time and energy. Assign seats, or allow students to sign up for regular seats.

- Whatever students need to do with homework (put it in a basket, place it on the front left corner of their desk, pass it to a proctor), they should do the same way every day without prompting.
- A *Do Now* (the following technique) should be in the same place every day: on the board or in the packet. The objectives for the lesson, the agenda, and the homework for the coming evening should be on the board already, also in the same predictable place every day.

## TECHNIQUE 29

## DO NOW

Students should never have to ask themselves, “What am I supposed to be doing?” when they enter your classroom, nor should they be able to claim not to know what they should be doing. You want students to know what to do and to know there is no ambiguity here. Those two goals—being clear with students about what to be working on and eliminating the excuses that lead to distraction—are the rationale for **Do Now**, a short activity that you have written on the board or is waiting at their desks before they enter.

The *Do Now* means that students are hard at work even before you have fully entered the room. They are both productive during every minute and ready for instruction as soon as you start. They have done the anticipatory set and are thinking about what’s coming.

An effective *Do Now*, which can bring incredible learning power to a room, should conform to four critical criteria to ensure that it remains focused, efficient, and effective:

1. Students should be able to complete the *Do Now* without any direction from the teacher and without any discussion with their classmates. Some teachers misunderstand the purpose of the *Do Now* and use a version of the technique that requires them to explain to their students what to do and how to do it: “Okay, class, you can see that the *Do Now* this morning asks you to solve some typical problems using area. Remember that to solve area problems, you have to multiply.” This defeats the purpose of establishing a self-managed habit of productive work.
2. The activity should take three to five minutes to complete.

3. The activity should require putting a pencil to paper, that is, there should be a written product from it. This not only makes it more rigorous and more engaging, but it allows you to better hold students accountable for doing it since you can clearly see whether they are (and they can see that you can see).
4. The activity should preview the day’s lesson (you are reading *The Jacket*, and the *Do Now* asks students to write three sentences about what they’d do if they thought someone stole their little brother’s favorite jacket) or review a recent lesson (you want your kids to practice all of the standards they’ve mastered recently so they don’t forget them).

Beyond that, a *Do Now* works because of consistency and preparation. If there isn’t a *Do Now* in the same place every single day, students can claim plausible deniability. That said, a *Do Now* doesn’t need to be written on the board. If you do post it on the board, you can write it in advance on a large piece of newsprint and tape or use a magnet to affix it to the board before students walk in, thus saving precious moments when you would otherwise be transcribing the *Do Now* onto the board.

For example, a fifth-grade English teacher might use a *Do Now* to review a vocabulary word from the previous week. Because the important thing is for students to be able to do the work on their own, she would have already set the precedent that students could and should use their notes as necessary:

*In your notebook:*

1. Define scarce.
2. Explain how it means more than just having a small amount of something.
3. Use scarce in a sentence that tells about a time when something being scarce affected you or your family.
4. Name the noun form of scarce.

This example is from a math class:

1. Solve to find the width of a rectangle with an area of 104 square centimeters and a length of 13 centimeters. Show your work.
2. Give the possible dimensions of at least two other rectangles with the same area but different dimensions.

- *Visceral.* Teachers often assume a *Prop* has to be verbal and carry a message. To the contrary, *Props* are usually better when they rely on movement and sound, especially percussive sound. *Props* that don't use much in the way of words are less likely to get tiresome; their half-life is longer because there's no phrase to wear out. A quick, "Oh, yeah," is fine but something like, "On the way to college!" is likely to get old (and show its age) quickly. Furthermore, there's something fun and muscular about the thunder of group percussion. Students like noise and rhythm. Some will drum on anything in your class if given the chance. Embrace that. Make sure your *Props* involve movement and controlled but emphatic noise such as the stomping of feet or clapping of hands.
- *Universal.* When you *give Props*, everybody joins in. It's up to you to set and enforce this expectation.
- *Enthusiastic.* The tone is fun and lively. It should be a break—brief and fun—from hard work. Resist the temptation to make it too grown-up; it doesn't have to narrate values and express a mission-aligned personal credo. If it is a little bit of silly, it will reinforce moments when students have already demonstrated those things. *Props* are the exclamation point, not the sentence. Just make it fun enough for students to want to join in. One easy way to increase students' enthusiasm is to let a student choose the *Prop* from among the various ones you've developed as a class.
- *Evolving.* Let your students suggest and develop ideas for *Props*. They will constantly renew the systems with fresh and funky ideas and will participate more vigorously because they will have helped invent them. And if they are forever thinking of new ones, *Props* will never get tired, boring, and obligatory.

Here are six ideas for *Props* (most of them stolen from great teachers, who themselves borrowed them or invented them with the help of students):

- "The Hitter." You say, "Let's give Clarice a Hitter." Your kids pretend to toss a ball and swing a bat at it. They shield their eyes as if to glimpse its distant flight. Then they mimic crowd noise suitable for a home run for some fraction of a full second.
- "The Lawnmower." You say: "Let's give Jason a Lawnmower." Your kids reach down to pull the chord to start the mower and yank upward twice. They make engine sounds, grip the imaginary handles, and smile for some fraction of a full second before the *Prop* ends.

- "The Roller-Coaster." You say: "Oh, man, that answer deserves a Roller-coaster." Your kids put their open hands in front of them pointing upward at forty-five degrees, palms down. They "chug, chug, chug" (three times only) with their hands mimicking a roller coaster slugging its way up the last steep hill. Then they shout "Woo, woo, woo" three times as their hands mimic a coaster speeding over three steep hills after the big drop.
- "Two Hands." You say: "Jimmie, lead us in a No Hands." Jimmie calls out, "Two hands!" Your kids snap twice with both hands while chanting, "Ay, ay!" Jimmie calls out, "One hand!" Your kids snap twice with one hand while chanting "Ay, ay!" Jimmie calls out, "No hands!" Your kids do a funky impromptu dance for exactly one second.
- "Hot Pepper." You say: "An answer like that deserves a Hot Pepper." Your kids hold up an imaginary hot pepper, dangling it above their mouths. They take a bite and make a sizzle sounds "tsssss" for exactly one second.
- "Two Snaps, Two Stomps." You say: "Two snaps, two stomps for Jimmie P.!" or a variation on the sounds. Your kids deliver two snaps and two thundering stomps that end perfectly on cue.



## REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

1. Script the steps and expectations for the five most critical routines in your classroom.
2. Make a poster outlining everything your students need to have to be prepared at the beginning of class. Post it on your wall. Practice referring students to it (nonverbally perhaps) before class begins.
3. Make a list of the three most common requests students make while you are teaching. Determine an appropriate nonverbal signal they can give you to request each of them. Make a poster showing each. Practice pointing at the poster and asking students to return to their seat if they do not ask for and receive your nonverbal approval for one week. Do not always give them your approval if the request comes during key instructional time.

some reasonable compensation. You could allow students to purchase the right for some other price, for example, say, twenty math problems or ten minutes of classroom service (cleaning desks, picking up trash).

## DEFINITIONS

### PROPS

Effective systems and routines can also make your classroom more productive by harnessing public praise. **Props**—also called “shout-outs” and “ups”—are public praise for students who demonstrate excellence or exemplify virtues. Everyone responds to praise, to a crowd cheering for them and rooting them on. Making sure that it happens, inspires, and is reliably on-message is one of the most productive things you can do in your classroom. What better reward is there for trying a tough question, persevering, finding your own mistake, or explaining to your peers how to solve a problem than receiving the public praise of the class? If you can consistently enable classmates to deliver resounding praise to their peers in two seconds flat, you can build a culture that valorizes achievement and effort without sacrificing order or time on task. Your students hear the command—“Two stomps for Imani!”—and respond automatically and thunderously: every foot stomping twice (and only twice) in unison before it’s back to learning.

The key is investing the time at the outset to teach students to give props the right way: crisply, quickly, and enthusiastically. Ensuring that you teach your students to deliver *Props* that meet the following criteria will go a long way to ensuring your success:

- *Quick.* You should be able to cue a prop in one second. If you say, “Two claps for David” and the response is any slower than that, take the time to teach your students to do it right by doing it again and doing it faster: “When we give up our claps, it’s because someone did something great, so I want to hear them right away. Let’s give that one more time and see if we can do it in less than a second.” Similarly, the *Prop* itself should be fast because you don’t have time to waste and because there’s nothing less energizing than an exhortation that starts strong but peters out. Be short so the energy level stays high. The routine for *Props* should take less than five seconds from beginning to end. The transition back to the task at hand is immediate.

## TECHNIQUE 41

### THRESHOLD

Most important moment to set expectations in your classroom is the minute your classroom students enter or, if they are transitioning within a class—when they formally begin their lesson. The first minute, when students cross the threshold into the classroom, you must remind them of the expectations. It's the critical time to establish rapport, set the tone, and reinforce the expectations in a routine that makes excellence habitual. With culture, getting it right and keeping it right is much easier than fixing it once it's gone wrong. *Threshold* ensures that you make a habit of getting it right from the outset day.

Usually you will find a way to greet your students by standing in the physical world of the classroom—astride the door, taking the opportunity to remind students where they are (they are with you now; no matter what the expectations elsewhere, you will always expect their best), where they are going (to class) and what you will demand of them (excellence and effort). Typically each student who enters shakes your hand, looks you in the eye, and offers a civil and friendly greeting. (Some teachers use more informal variations on this.)

Use the greeting to engage students briefly and build rapport: "Loved your work, David"; "Nice game last night, Shayna"; "Looking for great things from you today, Mr. Williams!"; "Oh my gosh, your hair looks great, Shanice!" You can occasionally (or always) greet the procession of students through the doorway with a description of what's to come and a reminder of what's expected: "We have a quiz today. Be sure to prepare your materials, then begin the *Do Now*. This will help you review. Okay, let's go." You should also use the threshold to set expectations by correcting weak handshakes, untidy attire, or lack of eye contact. Usually, this is easy to do since *Threshold* allows for its own simple implicit routine. Get it wrong, and you go back in the line and try it again, and when you meet the expectations of the room, you enter on good terms. Incidentally, another reason for using a handshake: it allows you to control access to the room. If a student walks past with head down and without a greeting, you always just hold on to his or her hand and not let go until the resulting eye contact allows you to gently correct the behavior.

*Threshold* will naturally take on a tone and feel in keeping with your own personal style: it can be outgoing or quiet, warm or crisp. Yet no matter the style, *Threshold* should always accomplish two things: (1) establish a personal

connection between you and your students by a brief personal check-in (ideally one in which you greet each student by name), and (2) reinforce your classroom expectations.

Dacia Toll adds a slightly different flavor to the greeting she offers each of her sixth-grade writing students at New Haven's Amistad Academy. "Good morning, Sisuelas," she says to one student as she shakes her hand. "Nice to see you again, Sandra." Her air of conviviality expresses to each student her genuine interest in and enjoyment of their presence. When one student greets her with a slightly-too-informal, "Hey, what up?" she responds, warmly, "'What up' is not appropriate," gently holding his hand as he passes and directing him to the back of the line. A few seconds later, he greets her with a "good morning" and, without retribution, she nods: "Good morning, Jabali." Her tone remains warm and kind. His test of the limits is utterly natural, she knows, and her response explains her expectations rather than chastising or punishing. Having the chance to try it again is the benign consequence, and he enters the class smiling as well.

At North Star Academy in Newark, New Jersey, Jamey Verilli adds a few wrinkles of his own. As his students wait outside the classroom, he quizzes them on last night's vocabulary words. "Okay, *tilled*. Who would do tilling, and what kind of work was it?" Verilli asks. The message is powerful: every minute matters; we are in school even when we are not in class. After a brief preamble—"Okay, gentlemen, when you come in, you need to set your desk with your homework at the top. Your *Do Now* today is going to require you to spell some of these words we've been studying. Clear?" Verilli posts himself in the door jamb. Like Toll, he offers a personal greeting as he shakes each student's hand. Verilli's version is a bit more muscular but still kindly. He refers to students by their last names: "Good afternoon, Mr. Mumford. Good afternoon, Mr. Reeves." A young Mr. Early slouches a bit and glances away. "Stand up straight and give me good grip," Verilli responds, and Mr. Early quite happily does just that. He seems to like the expectations for him, as if it signals to him his own importance. Two students later, young Mr. Smallwood approaches, wearing a new pair of glasses. "Looking sharp, Mr. Smallwood! I like it!" Verilli cheers, his upbeat demeanor all the more compelling for the tone of formality it breaks. Mr. Smallwood beams up at him, shaking his teacher's hand firmly. Things are not going quite so swimmingly for Mr. Merrick, who has been talking. "Step out [of the room]," Verilli commands, as he sends Mr. Merrick back to get his entrance to the classroom just right.

In these classrooms, the mood is warm but industrious. All of the students are hard at work just a few seconds after hitting the door—even Mr. Merrick, who

is soon settled, redirected, and ready for class, compelling evidence of the power of *Threshold* to set expectations from the outset.

Occasionally teachers insist that it's impossible for them to greet their students at the door: their school forbids students to wait outside the class in the hallway, or the teacher moves to the students rather than vice versa. When a greeting at the door is impossible, invent another ritual to signify that something formal has begun: students rise, and you and they greet one another at the beginning of each class. The point is not so much the doorway as the power of ritual to help kids see that your classroom is different from the other places they go.

#### TECHNIQUE 42

#### NO WARNINGS

As a teacher, I almost always found that if I was angry with my students, I had waited too long to address issues or that I was not using consequences consistently. Using minor interventions and small consequences that you can administer fairly and without hesitation before a situation gets emotional is the key to maintaining control and earning students' respect. Relying on personal charm, emotion, or similar aspects of your relationships to get students to do what's expected of them also risks missing the point. It's not about you. Students are not supposed to behave to please you; they are supposed to behave so they can better themselves, be the best people they can be, and get the most out of school.

Your goal should be to take action rather than to get angry:

- *Act early.* Try to see the favor you are doing kids in catching off-task behavior early and using a minor intervention of consequence to prevent a major consequence later. This is a good thing.
- *Act reliably.* Be predictably consistent, sufficient to take the variable of how you will react out of the equation and focus students on the action that precipitated your response.
- *Act proportionately.* Start small when the misbehavior is small; don't go nuclear unless the situation is nuclear.

The behavior that most often gets in the way of taking action is the warning. Giving a warning is not taking action; it is threatening that you might take an action and therefore is counterproductive. Warnings tell students that a certain