

Classroom management practice guide

Gaining all students' attention

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Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This practice guide is part of a suite of foundational resources for beginning teachers, teachers working in new environments, or experienced teachers who want to refine or refresh specific elements of their classroom management practice. They can be used to individually reflect on and refine one's own practice, or as shared resources to support mentoring and other collaborative and whole-school approaches to improving classroom management.

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s guidance is based on a synthesis of the most rigorous and relevant research evidence and guidance on classroom management from a wide range of research experts and expert practitioners across Australia and internationally.

This practice guide will help you to refine methods for gaining all students' attention to create a learning environment that supports student engagement and minimises disruptive behaviours.

Efficiently gaining all students' attention supports student safety, maximises instructional time and reduces the likelihood of students missing critical information. Teachers use [scanning](#), non-verbal gestures, and audible or visual prompts to gain student attention, to ensure students are focused and ready to receive instructions.

Gaining all students' attention requires the following steps:

1. Position yourself where all students can see you.
2. Use a verbal or audible prompt to get students to focus on you.
3. Pause, scan and respond to students' behaviour.

Gaining all students' attention requires several skills, including [acknowledgement and praise](#), [clear communication](#), [deliberately pausing](#), [non-verbal corrections](#), [scanning](#) and [voice control](#).

Always interact with students with a calm tone, respect and politeness – for example, greeting students on first encounter and completing instructions with 'Thank you'. Positively frame communication, stating what students need to do rather than what they don't (that is, avoid using words like 'no' and 'don't'). This models respectful and polite interactions for students and creates a positive and supportive learning environment.

Effectively gaining all students' attention

1. Position yourself where all students can see you

Standing in a position where all students can see you allows students to look at you, listen to your instructions and see your non-verbal prompts. It helps students focus and be ready to receive critical information, reducing the risk of misunderstanding.

Your position should also allow you to see all students – for example, stand at the front of the room or where the number of students who need to turn around to see you is kept to a minimum.

2. Use a verbal or audible prompt to get students to focus on you

Effectively implementing prompts to get students to focus on you maximises instructional time and reduces the likelihood of students missing critical information because they were not looking and listening.

Different situations and settings – for example, when students are working at their desks, around the classroom, or in noisy environments such as a multipurpose hall – may require different techniques.

If most students are focused elsewhere, techniques to gain all students' attention will need to be audible so they know you need them to look and listen. They can be spoken, sung, clapped or produced, such as with a bell. They should be kept as simple as possible. Common and effective techniques include a countdown, call and response, or a visual cue or gesture, such as raising a hand in the air with a verbal prompt for students.

These techniques need to be taught so students know what to listen or look for, and how to respond – usually to stop what they are doing, look and listen.

Count down

Instruct students in what to do and then count down from a low number such as three or five, deliberately pausing between each number and scanning student behaviour. Remind students of expected behaviours as necessary to focus their attention. If the noise level is high, give the instruction in a loud voice that gains all students' attention, then reduce the volume with each number as the noise in the classroom reduces. 'One' can be in a whisper as students are silent and looking at you.

For example:

- 'Looking at me in 5 (pause), 4 (pause), 3 (pause), 2 (pause) and 1.'
- 'Finish the sentence you are writing in 5 pens down and eyes facing towards me. Four, thank you [student], pen down facing this way. Three, I can see most eyes facing this way. Two (pause) and one.'

Call and response

Use a verbal or audible prompt for students to reply in unison. For example:

Teacher call		Student response
'1, 2, 3, eyes on me.'	→	'1, 2 eyes on you.'
'Ready to listen.'	→	'Ready to learn.'
A short clapping pattern.	→	Students copy the clapping pattern.

Use visual cues to complement verbal prompts

Visual cues usually support a verbal prompt to gain student attention – for example, raising one hand in the air, or holding up 5 fingers and lowering them one at a time as you verbally count down.

In noisy situations, visual cues may be more appropriate. Examples include standing in front of students and putting your finger to your lips to signal silence, holding your hand up to indicate students should copy the gesture and be silent, acknowledging students looking with a thumbs up, and motioning for students to encourage students around them to focus on you.

3. Pause, scan and respond to students' behaviour

Pausing and scanning allows you to ensure that students are following your instructions to stop, look and listen, as well as acknowledge those who are meeting behaviour expectations and correct those who are not.

Once you have used a technique to gain all students' attention:

- Deliberately pause and scan all students.
- Acknowledge students giving you their attention – for example, by saying 'Thank you' or giving a thumbs up, and praise students exceeding behaviour expectations specific to them.
- Use a correction for students that will redirect their focus to you – for example, moving closer to them, within their line of sight (proximity), or giving a quick correction.
- Acknowledge students when they correct their behaviour.

Rehearse and practise gaining all students' attention

Use the checklist for each step in the following section to identify your strengths and prioritise the step you will focus on first for rehearsal and practice. Focus on one step at a time until you can confidently demonstrate each item on the checklist.

Begin by scripting and rehearsing without students present. Consider filming your rehearsal and using the relevant checklist to review the recording yourself or with a colleague.

Then practise with students present. Record and review your practice alone or with a colleague using the relevant checklist, making sure to follow school or employer policies regarding recording students.

Invite a colleague to observe you gaining all students' attention in action. Ask them to use the checklists to provide feedback on what went well and to suggest one area for further improvement.

1. Position yourself where all students can see you

Consider when and where you'll need to gain students' attention throughout the day and week – for example, outside your classroom when students are preparing to enter, during group work, and in other locations of the school such as at the end of assembly. For each of these scenarios:

Deliberately plan – and rehearse, if possible – where you will stand so you can see all students and all students can see you.

Imagine where students will be and what they will be doing. Will all students be able to see you?
Are you in the best position to gain all students' attention?

2. Use a verbal or audible prompt to get students to focus on you

Script, rehearse then practise suitable techniques to gain all students' attention. These may vary depending on the situation and could include:

a call and response – Create your own or use student input as they may be able to identify their favourites from past teachers.

a countdown – ensuring you:

use the lowest countdown possible – usually from 5 or 3

clearly communicate expectations, acknowledge expected behaviours, and correct behaviour that does not meet expectations between each number

use good timing by not rushing or taking too long

finish with a deliberate pause and scan.

visual cues – to complement verbal prompts for noisy situations such as group work or assembly. What visual cues will you use? Are your visual cues clearly visible, and easily understood by students?

3. Pause, scan and respond to students' behaviour

Rehearse, then practise:

scanning left to right and front to back with obvious head and eye movements

combining deliberate pausing and scanning to monitor all students, acknowledging a range of students who demonstrate expected behaviours, such as looking and listening, and praising students exceeding behaviour expectations specific to them

using a positively framed verbal or non-verbal correction to address student behaviour that does not meet expectations, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

Questions for reflection

When you have refined and combined each of the steps in this guide, consider:

- How has refining your techniques to gain all students' attention increased instructional time in your lessons?
- What impact has refining your techniques for gaining all students' attention had on students' focus when you deliver instructions?
- Does your ability to encourage students to give you their attention develop throughout the term or year or dissipate? Why? Does your classroom culture play a role? And if so, how?
- What other skills and practices do you need to refine to support your practice in gaining all students' attention?

Regularly revise gaining all students' attention

Schedule points in the year to revise this practice for yourself and your students.

For more practical guidance

AERO has developed a suite of resources to support teachers and school leaders to refine or refresh their foundational practices in creating safe and supportive learning environments through effective classroom management. Please read the [Classroom Management Resources: User Guide](#) for an overview of these resources and suggestions for their use.