
TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Low-Key, High-Impact Classroom Management Materials

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Professional development courses and handbooks on effective teaching strategies always emphasize the importance of knowing one's students and understanding their needs as individuals. However, I teach large, multi-level English classes that typically meet once a week. I am on the go, and my students are, too. It is difficult to see them as individuals; in fact, it can be difficult to learn their names and keep track of their attendance without sacrificing valuable instructional time. Over the years, however, I have discovered some time-saving strategies for managing classroom routines and getting to know my students as individuals. The two tips described below are variations on what seasoned teachers probably call a name tent and the One-Minute paper with adaptations for classroom management purposes.

Nameplates

The traditional nameplate, or tent, is a folded piece of paper that stands on the student's desk with student's name facing the teacher, making it possible for the teacher and classmates to call each other by name. Typically, there is extra, empty space next to the name and on the back of the tent. Both spaces can be put to good use. Alongside their names, my students draw small images to give the class visual clues about themselves, for example, their hobbies, club or team memberships, and part-time job sites. The images help with memory, and gradually, class members (and I) begin to see each other as more than just names or invisible members in a group.

The side of the nameplate facing the student can be useful, too. I have begun printing essential classroom English phrases in this space (see Appendix 1). Students use the expressions like a cue card or scaffold that helps them begin and sustain their use of English. I adjust the list of expressions depending on the level of

the class, and students frequently add their own useful expressions to my list as they see the need.

Personalized Reflection Cards

Angelo and Cross (1993) described a wide array of options for helping teachers collect valuable feedback on their classes in efficient, unobtrusive ways. My “personalized reflection card” functions as both a Minute Paper (Angelo and Cross, 1993) and a dialog journal adapted for large, once-a-week classes. On one side of the card is a graphic organizer where students write a short comment at the conclusion of each class, for example, what they liked, what they learned, or what was difficult. Since the space provided is small and time is short, they are not intimidated by the task. My short but personal reply to each comment ensures that every student is seen as an individual even when we do not have much person-to-person time in class.

The time needed for writing my personal responses is not as burdensome as I once thought it would be. Over the weeks, the comments grow into a personalized dialogue much like a text message or blog thread does. With large classes, patterns of response are particularly important. If a dozen students had difficulty with the same task, I know immediately know how to begin planning my next lesson. Students personalize the reverse side of the card with their names and other details of their own choosing and design. The result is a visual “About the Author” page and, like their nameplate, helps me see my students as individuals rather than an anonymous member of a group.

Possibilities

Nameplates and reflection cards can be used in a variety of ways other than those described above. For example, they can be efficient means of taking attendance; the nameplates or reflection cards that are not picked up show who is absent and can be set aside for record keeping after class. They can also function as place cards, showing students where to sit. This works well for giving students new conversation partners or for forming groups based on shared interests, proficiency level, or project-based teams. Both nameplates and reflection cards have empty space that I have not yet used well. Students could, for example, record their major quiz and test scores inside their nameplates or in a reserved space on their reflection

cards to track their progress in the course. They enjoy the opportunity to be the teaching assistant by handing out, collecting, and assigning seating using the nameplates. They often have better insights about creating effective student groups than I do, and they thoroughly enjoy challenging themselves to learn and remember more about each other. Because both nameplates and reflection cards are used in every lesson, it is best if they can be constructed with cardstock rather than lightweight paper, and it is important that both are retrieved by the teacher at the close of each class.

In conclusion, students—even students who love their digital devices—enjoy making simple classroom management materials such as the nameplate and personalized reflection card described here. More important, using them has a powerful, positive impact on group dynamics, raising the energy level and degree of interaction among students and creating, in turn, ideal conditions for communication.

Reference

Angelo, T. and Cross, P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

About the Author

Seth Wallace earned an MA in French at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. Today he lives in Japan where he enjoys family time, dog training, gardening, marine sports, and motor scooter adventures. He is interested in world politics, current affairs, the environment, and his current pursuit—a master's degree in TESOL from the Nagoya University of Foreign Studies.

Appendix 1

Nameplate

<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">Name here</h1>	
Classroom English: Use these sentences as often as you can	
1. I have a question	6. How do you say ___ in ___?
2. I don't understand.	7. Let's be partners.
3. Could you say that again?	8. What's the answer?
4. How do you say/spell ___?	9. I'm finished.
5. What does ___ mean?	10. Is this okay?

Appendix 2

Personalized Reflection Card

Week	Date	Student Comment	Teacher Response
1	4/25	<i>My partner, Saaya, speaking is very good. I want to speak like her.</i>	It's great that Saaya inspired you! Maybe you and she can speak English for fun outside of class, too.
2	5/2	<i>Today's activity was very fun. I love Harry Potter.</i>	So glad you enjoyed it! What other stories do you like as much as HP?
3	5/9		
4	5/16		