

The Secret To Perfect Transitions In 5 Simple Steps

January 17, 2015 by Michael Linsin (smartclassroommanagement.com)

Transitions are among the most perilous times of the day.

The frenetic movement, the close interaction, the loud voices and sense of freedom . . . All conspire to increase the likelihood of misbehavior.

Transitions can also waste precious learning time, bring tension and excitability to the classroom, and make it difficult to settle students back into a state of attentiveness.

It's a rare week that we don't hear from at least one teacher requesting help in this area.

A common complaint is that every transition is different and therefore can't be replicated like an everyday routine. A transition to literature circles, for example, may look very different from a transition to independent reading or to dismissal.

But here's the thing: **Where** students are going, or coming from, *isn't the transition*.

The transition is the space between. It's the sliver of time between each lesson or activity, which can be replicated. And herein lies the secret to perfect transitions.

If you standardize these brief moments, if you do the exact same thing regardless of where you're transitioning to or coming from, they'll be predictably smooth every time.

Here's how in five simple steps:

1. Signal for attention.

When it's time to wrap up an activity and transition to something new, the first step is to signal for your students' attention. You can use a chime or bell if you wish, but I recommend a simple, "Can I have your attention, please."

2. Use "In a moment."

After waiting until every eye is on you, begin your directions with the words, "In a moment." What this does is keep your students from moving on, mentally or otherwise, until you finish speaking. It signals to them that you have more to say.

Example: "In a moment, we're going to begin a vocabulary lesson."

3. Give your directions.

During this step you'll provide the precise details. You'll explain as plainly as possible what you want them to do in order to be prepared for the next activity.

Example: "When I say 'go,' you're going to put away your science materials, clean off your desk, and meet me on the rug quietly."

Note: "When I say go" is another strategy that encourages listening and keeps students from moving until you give your signal.

4. Use your "Go" signal.

After asking if there is anyone who doesn't know what to do, give your "go" signal. The word 'go' is an action word that will immediately propel your students toward whatever objective you set for them.

5. Observe.

Your only job now is to observe and verify that your directions are being carried out. Resist the urge to offer reminders or encouragement or otherwise interrupt them during the transition.

If you're unhappy with what you see, then send them back to do it over again.

Building A Bridge

So many classrooms get bogged down during transitions. Students become restless and distracted, misbehavior increases, and teachers find themselves stressed-out, raising their voice, and waiting on students in order to begin the next lesson.

The chief reason for this is a lack of standardization. The space between is a turbulent river students must find their own way across.

To make transitions efficient and devoid of misbehavior, you must build your students a bridge. You must build them a bridge they can count on by following the exact same steps, in the exact same way, using the exact same verbal cues and prompts.

In this way, it doesn't matter where you're transitioning from or where you're going, your students will always know what's expected of them.

Now it's important to note that each of the steps above must be taught, modeled, and practiced like you would any other routine. You're essentially stringing together several mini-routines into a single, uniform transition you can depend on multiple times a day. You're setting your students up for success by constructing a surefooted span over troubled water, a trestle to carry them seamlessly from one learning experience to the next.

So lay your deck. Hoist your railings. Bind your struts and bracing.

And you'll have perfect transitions every time.