Classroom management is a hot topic for many ESL teachers. As teachers, we have to spend time figuring out how to effectively run and manage our classroom in a way that works for everybody. We also have to create clear procedures and routines to maximize learning opportunities and minimize disruption. Luckily, there are some specific guidelines that help ESL teachers achieve this. In this article, we will look at some of the top tips for ESL classroom management. These strategies help to improve teacher-student interaction, lesson dynamics, and create a classroom environment conducive to learning.

**Preparation**

Make sure you are fully prepared for each lesson. Students often pick up on signs that a teacher is unprepared and this can lead to misbehaviour, so make sure you plan your lessons well in advance. Go through your lesson plan before you teach and make sure you have enough activities, games and exercises to keep your students engaged in the lesson. Furthermore, being prepared will give you extra confidence in the classroom and help you and your students stay on track during the lesson.

**The lesson**

A good place for you to start maximizing learning and minimizing disruption is with the lesson itself. Make sure you have a clear learning objective and adequate activities and materials for your students. Your ESL lessons should be fun, interesting, well-paced, well-transitioned, and contextual for students. In the lesson, give students challenges that are not too easy and not too difficult to achieve. This can be effective in establishing and maintaining a positive and orderly classroom environment. If students pay attention to the lesson, they will naturally spend less time disrupting the class or doing off-task behaviour.

The introduction of the lesson itself is a key element in lesson design. If you let the students know what they are supposed to learn, it gives the students a sense of security and a focal point for the lesson. In addition, give a clear explanation of the content and check for initial student understanding. Following that, give some guided practice and then some subsequent solitary practice intermixed with periodic reviews. These elements of a well-planned and well-taught lesson help to ensure motivation, participation, and maximum learning in the classroom.

Since student attention spans are usually quite short, quick and sensible transitions between topics are important in maintaining student focus. Clear transitions increase teaching time and stop students from becoming distracted, which in turn decreases any possibility of misbehaviour. Many ESL teachers like to use visual prompts such as pictures or signs to show students what they are required to do and how to transition. Visual prompts should be pinned near to the board for everyone to see and give clear instructions for the students to follow such as get into pairs, stop talking, sit in groups, open your book, etc. Other teachers like to use countdown timers to transition from one activity to another. There are many different ways to facilitate transitions. Whichever one you choose, stick to it as establishing a routine helps students clearly understand what you expect from them.

The way you sequence your activities is also important. There are many factors to take into account, depending on the type of class you have and the time of day your lesson takes place. Do you need to start the lesson off with a game to liven things up? Do you need a cooling activity to calm the students down? Is Friday afternoon the best time to tackle grammar? The sequence of activities also depends on the structure and type of lesson you are going to teach. Sequencing activities does however become a lot easier once you get to know your students.
Communicate

Communication helps you to find out what motivates and interests your students. Then you can incorporate these elements into your lessons. This will help to get your students participating and using English in the classroom. If possible, do activities where students have the ability to define their preferences. Try to learn about your students’ hopes and ambitions by listening to their conversations. Then you can mould activities and games to suit them and create a better learning environment for the whole class.

During the lesson, communicate your expectations clearly to your students. There are many ways you can do this. For example, you could model the activity in front of the class before students begin the task, or you could scaffold examples of what you want the students to produce. Making sure your students are aware of your expectations at each stage of the lesson is vital in creating a positive learning environment.

Communication is an important tool in preventing behavioural problems. Getting to know your students helps you analyse their behaviour. Try to communicate with each student and build a rapport with them. You can do this slowly over time. A short conversation on a regular basis will help to go a long way in building a rapport. You will even find that students who appear hostile or disinterested can be encouraged to participate once you engage them in a little conversation. One way to communicate that may come easily is humour. Humour also shows students that you are ‘human after all’ and it can be a useful tool in diffusing problems when they arise.

If the language barrier is an issue, you could also make an effort to learn the first language of your students. Your students will certainly appreciate you learning at least a few key phrases. These phrases can be used as and when you need them and help to make instructions clear.

Set clear rules from the first day of class

Having class rules is not a bad thing. Rules show students what is expected of them. When you are devising rules for your class, take into account your school or university’s behaviour policy. This will make sure you don’t overstep the mark. Also, talk to your fellow teachers. They will normally be able to offer invaluable advice on what rules you should include in your classes and give you insight into what works and what doesn’t. Also, take into account your teaching style and the background culture of your students. Remember, class rules are there to maximize your students’ learning opportunities and minimize disruption.

Make class rules and behavioural expectations explicit from the first day of class. Expectations should be high and the students should have a voice in deciding the rules and consequences. If the rules are made clear from the outset, then this guarantees that all students understand what constitutes good behaviour as the term begins. With clearly stated rules and procedures, there is more of an assurance that all students will understand what is and is not acceptable.

Deal with problems immediately

A mistake that new teachers often make is not following through with consequences when a student breaks a rule. Students will always test class rules to see how you react. They like to know what they can and can’t get away with. If you let one student get away with something, it’s a green light for all the other students. Consequences should be enforced consistently, immediately, and fairly. Show consistency in dealing with misbehaviour. If you show favouritism toward one student over another, then classroom behaviour is likely to get worse.
Posting the rules is an effective reminder to the students as the rules and consequences remain visible year round. Consequences should match the student misbehaviour with a penalty when possible. Have the misbehaving student take action and make amends or give back to those whose lives may have been affected by the misdeed. These logical consequences teach students about the repercussions of their behaviour.

Be direct when telling a student that a rule has been broken. Do this without raising your voice if possible. Keep calm and remember consequences are geared towards positive outcomes. Be careful about giving consequences that are not accompanied by encouragement or guidance for the improvement of said misbehaviour. Be wary of confronting students in a way that back both parties into a corner. Don't give out heavy punishments or start shouting as this can lead to confrontation in a charged atmosphere. Though it's usually best to deal with a problem immediately, you can also try talking to the student privately or even wait until the student has calmed down.

**Confidence**

For new teachers, confidence can be a real problem, but be rest assured that every teacher feels slightly nervous before a new class. It’s normal. You may feel nervous, but your students don’t know this. As far as they are concerned, you are a hardy professional. The key is to present yourself with confidence. This can be done by being fully prepared. Another strategy often used by teachers is to simply pretend you are acting. When you are acting, you step outside of yourself and become someone else. This goes some way to improving confidence. Everyone has a different strategy for dealing with nerves. Experiment and find out what works for you. Just remember, you are the authority figure in the classroom and you are responsible for creating a productive learning environment for your students. You have to take charge even if it doesn’t come naturally. So develop your teaching persona and have fun with it. Your students will never know.

**Control the learning environment**

You may not be able to control the architecture or facilities of your classroom, but you can control how your room looks. You can control the lighting and what goes on the classroom walls. Work with your students to make the classroom pleasant to be in and create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Display your students work around the class. Students often go to great lengths when they create a poster or story. Showing their work around the class gives students a sense of achievement. It also helps to show how much the students have progressed.

**Control classroom seating**

You have the power to control where your students are situated. You can use seating plans to limit problem behaviour and maximize learning potential. Seat problem students at the front of the class, or seat strong students next to weak ones. You can change your classroom from a more formal setting to a more informal setting to encourage a more interactive and cooperative student environment. Generally, conditions of the classroom environment can affect student behaviour. A dark classroom can make students tired or promote off-task behaviour. A hot classroom can make students restless. Do what you can to ensure a suitable physical environment for learning. Reorganizing classroom seating also allows for easier movement from student-to-student or group-to-group and this has significant merit in preventing time wasting.

Remember, effective classroom management is something that is developed over time. Don’t worry if you don’t get it right the first time. As teachers, we learn to review and adapt the approaches we take to teaching. It's all part of the teaching experience. Good luck!