

5. You set standards or steer students in a direction you think especially fruitful. For example, you could advise them to write a sentence defining the vocabulary word *imperceptible* and ask them to ensure that their sentence makes it clear that *imperceptible* is different from *invisible*. Or you could ask students to describe what the Capulets think of the Montagues in *Romeo and Juliet* and then push them to understand the intensity of the hatred by asking them to write their answer in the words a member of the family would use.
6. Students remember twice as much of what they are learning if they write it down.

With all these advantages to writing, it's worth looking for every opportunity to have your students write—not just to improve their writing but to improve the quality of the thinking that informs discussions at key points in the lesson.

SEE IT IN ACTION: CLIP 12

EVERYBODY WRITES

In clip 12 on the DVD, Art Worrell of North Star Academy demonstrates *Everybody Writes*. He begins the sequence by asking his class a deep and challenging question: "What are some of the characteristics or qualities that an individual must have to change history?" This is a truly rich and important question to ask, but ask yourself what the very first student to raise his or her hand would say without reflection. What would the quality of the answer and the subsequent discussion be, and how ready would students be to ground their arguments in evidence?

Worrell anticipates this and asks all of his students to begin writing answers. He asks them to brainstorm "two to three characteristics that an individual must have." This direction is critical and underscores the power of this technique. If you take answers without asking everybody to write, you can really ask students to think of and keep only one answer in their heads. *Everybody Writes* allows Worrell to instantly increase the rigor and amount of thinking students do and also to stress the important fact that there are many answers.

Notice also Worrell's level of preparation. He has given them space in their notes packets to brainstorm. This reduces the transaction cost of

the activity (no fumbling around looking for scrap paper) and ensures that students will retain a record of their thinking. And of course the proof is in the pudding: lots of volunteers to answer (and if there weren't an easy way to cold-call) and high-quality answers that will lead to a rich discussion.

These six benefits work on at least three axes: they increase the quality of the ideas discussed in your class and expand the number of students likely to participate and their readiness to do so. And regardless of who actually speaks up, the exercise increases the ratio since it causes everybody to answer the question, not just those who discuss.

TECHNIQUE 27

VEGAS

“Every lesson needs a little Vegas,”

Dave Levin, founder and leader of the high-achieving KIPP schools has observed. The *Vegas* is the sparkle, the moment during class when you might observe some production values: music, lights, rhythm, dancing. *Vegas* draws students into a little bit of magic. But don't be fooled: *Vegas* isn't sparkle-for-sparkle's sake. It reinforces not just academics generally but one of the day's learning objectives. It's upbeat but often short, sweet, and on point. And once it's done, it's done.

Vegas can be the thirty-second interlude when students do the “action verb shimmy,” sing the “long division song,” or compete to see who can do the best charade for the day's vocabulary word. It's the moment when students compete to be the common denominator champion of the fifth grade or to finish as the king of Geography Mountain. It's a commercial break to remind you of the names of all of the midwestern states. It's the theatrical presentation of the story you just read, discussed in hushed tones or excited chatter or, best, a combination

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place be in a required binder, which is ideally provided by you and which you may even require to remain in the classroom at night so it won't get lost, damaged, or disorganized on the way to and from school. Your students can take home what they need that night in a homework folder, which can be color-coded so you and parents can readily identify it. Each night students can put everything they need for that night's assignment in the folder and leave the binder in the classroom.

Have a required format for organizing papers within the binder so everybody is using the same system and you can check to make sure everyone has and can find what they need. You might, for example, assign a number to all materials you expect students to keep in the binders and have students enter them into a table—for example, 37: notes on subject-verb agreement; 38: subject-verb agreement worksheet; 39: subject-verb agreement homework; and 40: worksheet for subject-verb agreement with compound subject.

That way when you say, "If you don't remember, check your notes," you know every student has the notes, and you can even tell them where in their binders they can find them. "They should be at number 37." Finally, you can ensure that students have a full and complete packet when reviewing for tests: "You'll need to take home items 32 to 45 from your binder to prepare for this test."

To ensure that students follow through, take the time to have students put their materials away during class: "Please add number 37, notes on subject-verb agreement, to your table of contents, and file these notes away on my signal. I want to hear your binders popping open on three"

TECHNIQUE #2

SLANT

No matter how great the lesson, if students aren't alert, sitting up, and actively listening, teaching them is like pouring water into a leaky bucket. Many teachers and schools practice lining up for fire drills and make sure everyone knows the routine for finding the right bus at the end of the day, but they rarely think about how to teach the behaviors and skills that help students concentrate, focus, and learn.

Five key behaviors that maximize students' ability to pay attention are in the acronym SLANT (the acronym was originally used by the first KIPP schools):

Sit up.

Listen.

Ask and answer questions.

Nod your head.

Track the speaker.

Some schools use variations of the **SLANT** technique, for example, **STAR** (Sit up, Track the speaker, Ask and answer questions like a scholar, and Respect those around you) or **S-SLANT** (which adds "smile").

One of the best aspects of the acronym is that it serves as shorthand. Teachers remind students to be attentive and ready learners by urging them simply and quickly to SLANT. The use of a consistent acronym is quick and efficient. Even better, SLANT can be broken apart when necessary. Teachers can remind their students about the "S" in SLANT or the "T" in it. In the best classrooms, the word is deeply embedded in the vocabulary of learning, as a noun ("Where's my SLANT?") and a verb ("Make sure you are SLANTing").

Since SLANTing is such a critical part of a high-performing classroom, you may want to develop nonverbal signals that allow you to reinforce and correct SLANTing without interrupting what you're otherwise doing: hands folded in front of you to remind students to sit up straight; pointing to your eyes with two fingers to remind students to track.

TECHNIQUES ON YOUR MARK

No coach in the world would let players enter the huddle without a helmet on or catch a fastball without a glove. You can't hope to win if you're not standing at the starting line with your shoes tied when the race begins. You should think the same way about learning in your classroom: every student must start class with books and paper out and pen or pencil in hand. This must be the expectation in

every class, every day. A coach doesn't start practice by telling kids to get their shoes on; kids show up with their shoes on. So don't ask your students to get ready as class begins; use **On Your Mark** to show them how to prepare before it begins and then expect them to do so every day.

How to Ensure Students Are on Their Marks When Class Starts

1. *Be explicit about what students need to have to start class.* Make it a small and finite list (fewer than five things) that doesn't change:
 - Paper out
 - Desk clear (of everything unnecessary to the lesson)
 - Pencil sharp and ready ("in the pencil tray")
 - Homework (in the upper right-hand corner of your desk)

At North Star Academy in Newark, principal Jamey Verilli refers to students' work stations, or just "stations," which they set up as part of their entry routine. On the wall is a diagram of how materials should look when a station is set up: books upper left, homework upper right, blank paper in the center. And nothing else.

2. *Set a time limit.* Be specific about when students need to have the everything ready. If you're not clear about when students need to be ready, your efforts to hold those who aren't accountable will result in arguments when students say they "were doing it" or "were about to."
3. *Use a standard consequence.* Have a small and appropriate consequence that you can administer without hesitation—perhaps loss of some privilege or doing some work to help the class stay prepared. Students who weren't on their marks might lose points in a token economy, have to sharpen all of the pencils in the pencil tray at lunchtime, or come to "homework club" ten minutes before school to make sure they have everything they need for the coming day.
4. *Provide tools without consequence (pencils, paper) to those who recognize the need before class.* There's a difference between not having a pencil and getting your pencil ready before class, only to realize the tip is broken or that you accidentally left it in math class. Part of preparation is recognizing in advance that you need something. Give students the incentive to take responsibility for getting what they need by allowing them access to the tools for them to succeed without consequence as long as they recognize this need

before you've started class. You might have a coffee can full of sharpened pencils that students can take if they trade in their old one and a stack of clean looseleaf paper on the corner of your desk. Students could help themselves to these during *Entry Routine*. Once class starts, the consequence for not being *On Your Mark* would apply.

5. *Include homework.* Homework is the most important thing most students will do all day that isn't directly supervised by a teacher. It cannot be left to chance. Make turning it in part of the routine students follow to be ready for the day. It should be turned in and checked for completeness at the start of class. There should be a separate consequence of not doing it—usually coming to “homework club” after school or during gym to complete the work that hasn't been done.

TECHNIQUE 5.4

SEAT SIGNALS

The bathroom is the last bastion of the unconverted. Given the opportunity, some students (especially those who can least afford it) will find creative ways to maximize their time there, particularly during the time of day when they can least afford it. For other students, a long, slow walk to the pencil sharpener can be an opportunity for unique displays of deportment not necessarily designed to reinforce their classmates' learning. An impressive degree of distraction can be created by enterprising students out of their seats at the wrong time or at their own discretion.

Furthermore, managing requests for bathroom and the like—justified or not, approved or not—can become a distraction from teaching. Conversations about who's next and when can eat up precious minutes. And you risk the scenario in which, at the critical moment in your lesson that you ask some key question, a student with his hand eagerly in the air would like to go to the bathroom. Your momentum and train of thought are shot. In short, you can't afford not to develop a set of signals for common needs, especially those that require or allow students to get out of their seats. You need **Seat Signals**.

This system should meet the following criteria:

- Students must be able to signal their request from their seats.
- Students must be able to signal requests nonverbally.