

## **The First Five Minutes**

**You can start class immediately  
with respect, care, and procedures.**

The bell has rung, and the students are still walking into the room. They wander around, talking to each other, talk or text on their cell phones, get their hair brushes out to groom themselves, and exchange a little playful punch—which then escalates into an argument, and maybe even a fight.

At which point, the teacher says, “The bell has rung. Would you all please sit down?”

No action.

“The bell has rung to start class. Sit down, please.”

No action.

“What’s the matter with this class? The bell has rung! Sit down, right now!”

Some action. The students sit down.

Why? Not because they respect the teacher, but because the students have the teacher trained. They know not to sit down until the teacher yells at them. That’s the signal to sit down.

And this is repeated, day after day, period after period, always ending with the same result: frustration and anger.

The teacher then takes attendance and everyone sits around waiting for the task to finish. This takes up another two to three minutes. After five minutes have been wasted, class starts. Finally.

If five minutes are wasted per classroom period, this translates to thirty minutes for a six-period school day. Multiplying that by a 180-day school year equates to one month of school learning wasted each year. Multiply that by twelve years of schooling, and one full year of instruction is completely lost during a student’s lifetime at school.

And that’s a conservative estimate. Shirley Hord, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Texas, discovered that three to seventeen minutes are wasted at the beginning of each class period each school year. That is, from the time the first student enters the classroom until instruction actually begins, wasted time can range from 9 percent to 32 percent of total class time, which is one-third of school time lost.

No one would tolerate wasting even a fraction of this time waiting in line at a supermarket or theater. At school, wasted time should be totally unacceptable.

## **It's All in How You Start**

Effective teachers use procedures and have trained their students to follow those procedures automatically so that class starts immediately and efficiently.

1. The teacher greets students at the door.
2. Students go through their start of class routine.
3. They sit in their assigned seats.
4. They look at the agenda.
5. They begin the opening assignment.

While students are preparing for class and beginning their opening assignments, the teacher is taking attendance or doing whatever housekeeping tasks are needed. At the end of five minutes, instruction begins.

Here are examples we have collected of how some effective secondary and elementary school teachers start various classes. They describe how they maximize the crucial first five minutes.

### **Examples from Secondary Teachers**

#### **Orchestra**

*When my students walk in the room, they retrieve their music and instruments, and are in their seats with all required supplies when the bell rings.*

*I have three Class Managers who help me with classroom procedures. One leads body warm-ups when the bell rings. While body warm-ups are going on, another Class Manager checks attendance (I also enter attendance into the grade book at this time). After warm-ups, the students have their instruments ready for tuning.*

*The third Class Manager leads tuning. I walk around to check if students have supplies on hand while this is happening. I also help students who are having tuning or instrument problems at this time. Our warm-ups and tuning are done in eight minutes. Everyone is then ready to start our music.*

Nile Wilson  
San Antonio, Texas

#### **Science**

*I have a procedure for entering the classroom:*

- *Pick up handouts*
- *Be seated*
- *Begin the bellwork*

*When students walk in the door, they go to the shelf where the papers they will need for the class period are stored. Papers are picked up and students find their seats. The daily agenda, objective, and bellwork assignment are always posted. Students know they are to begin working on the bellwork assignment. When they finish, they work on something else or wait quietly.*

*During this time, I take attendance and return papers (or a student helper returns papers). When I can see that most students have completed the bellwork, I begin speaking. "Thank you for coming in and getting to work. If you are still working, please continue as I tell you the agenda, 'the game plan,' for today." I point to the posted agenda and verbally repeat it. If papers have been returned to them, I use this time to give feedback on the assignment, and then we start the day.*

Karen Rogers (Karen specializes in challenging students—at-risk, SPED, and ELL)  
Olathe, Kansas

### **Language Arts**

*The students walk in, take their assigned seats, read the agenda and bellwork on the projected Protospace, and immediately go to work. A student who has been absent checks the make-up work folder. During this time, I do the necessary housekeeping tasks, such as submitting attendance, and checking and collecting the homework. After the bellwork, we start class. The process takes three to five minutes—five minutes when I have homework to check.*

Oretha Ferguson  
Fort Smith, Arkansas

### **Physical Education**

*The students come to PE, change into their PE attire, and "Start Walking." No one tells them what to do; they know the procedure. This procedure is repeated every day.*

Steve Geiman and colleagues  
Waynesboro, Virginia

### **Communication Arts**

*In five minutes, students walk into the room; retrieve their interactive notebooks; review the agenda, learning target, and essential question for the day (written on the whiteboard); and then, journal write to the prompt on the Smartboard.*

*Journal prompts often ask them to think about an idea connected to what we are learning about that day. After the five minutes (a timer is used), I often call on a few students to share their writing to begin instruction.*

Brandy Hackett  
Moberly, Missouri

## **Examples from Elementary Teachers**

### **First Grade**

*My first grade students enter the classroom and begin a series of morning opening procedures: backpacks, home learning folder, lunch and snack money, notes, and morning assignment. During this time, I take the attendance; they listen to the principal's message; and they recite the Pledge of Allegiance. I can't stress enough how important procedures and routines are. Many people do not believe that young children can follow procedures and routines. My classroom is proof that it works.*

Maureen Conley  
Central Islip, New York

### **Third Grade**

*When the bell rings, I greet my students on the blacktop. I walk past each one saying comments like, "I am glad to see you" and "We're going to have a great day." We walk to our classroom, where I welcome them inside. We greet each other at the door with a handshake and eye contact, saying "Good morning." It's a great way to start the day, showing respect for one another and making everyone feel welcomed to our classroom.*

*Once students enter, they do their morning duties of unpacking, taking attendance, and turning in homework. Then they start the bellwork assignment on the board. Our morning runs efficiently, and the day is off to a great start!*

Sarah Jondahl  
Brentwood, California

### **First Grade**

*When the bell rings, I stand at the door greeting my students. I say, "Good morning," to each of my students, including their name in the greeting. As students walk in, there is Disney music playing and the procedures posted on the board stating: unpack and turn in work, sharpen pencils, get breakfast, start morning work. During this, I am documenting attendance and lunch count.*

*I also watch student behavior. If I see someone looking sad, I make sure I approach them and say good morning again, and ask them if everything is okay. We then listen to announcements.*

*I have used this since Day One of my teaching experience, and it has worked extremely well.*

Janelle Papazian  
Phoenix, Arizona

### **Fifth Grade English Language Arts**

*I teach three separate sections of fifth grade English Language Arts at a Catholic elementary school. Each section or homeroom consists of thirty students, and I have the students in my classroom for ninety minutes every day. Having a set routine at the beginning of each class period allows me uninterrupted time to complete my daily housekeeping tasks, as well as walk around my classroom and check the students' homework.*

*When students enter my classroom, their daily Bell Ringer is projected on my Promethean Board. The students are to take out their agendas and copy down their homework. Students then place their homework assignments from the previous night on their desks. If the homework is not completed, they are to complete a missing assignment slip. Next, students work on their daily oral language or reading comprehension assignment. Following this, students silently read their independent reading books until the lesson begins (in a few minutes).*

Megan Toujouse  
Covington, Louisiana

### **Sixth Grade Science**

*I greet my students at the door as they are walking into the room. I have found that this is the best time for me to address their non-classroom-related concerns, rather than it being done during instructional time. Upon entering the classroom, the students read our Do-Now Board, which always has our daily task and any materials they may need to pick up at the front work bench. They also complete their task and/or lab notebook and take out all supplies needed for class: lab notebook, writing utensil, homework, etc. During this time, I am taking attendance.*

*Everything in the classroom has a procedure and the students know how to carry out our daily tasks within the first five minutes. Having an orderly system and procedures in place has really helped my students to focus on learning for the day!*

Cristina Bianchi  
Providence, Rhode Island

## **Pre-school Special Education**

*I teach pre-school Special Ed with eight special needs students and four typical developing students—twelve students, three to five years old. The special needs students are greeted by classroom assistants off the bus, car, or van into the school, and escorted into the hallway via the bathroom. Students take off their coats and book bags and place them on a chair. The teacher helps students with their bathroom needs. When students are finished, they pick up their coat and book bag, hold it in front of them, and walk down the hallway with the teacher in front of the line.*

*Once students enter the classroom, they place their coat and book bag into their cubby. There are three centers where students are initially able to go to:*

- 1. Art table*
- 2. Sandbox*
- 3. Carpet area*

*All other centers are closed. Four students are assigned to go to a center for five to seven minutes. During this time, I check each book bag, write quick notes to parents, and take attendance.*

*A timer (or when the red is all gone) is used to signal transition to the next center. My students have all learned transition procedures.*

*Once the timer sounds or the "Red is all gone," students can move to other centers: book center, role play, art center, etc. Students like going to a center and staying there for five to seven minutes. Students stay in the centers and do not wander around the room because the classroom environment is organized and structured. Students are engaged the minute they arrive in the classroom in an orderly fashion, until they are dismissed.*

Robin Barlak  
Parma, Ohio

## **Fourth Grade**

*As my students enter with breakfast in hand, they are greeted and receive pencils. Students unpack homework, copy assignments into their agenda, and complete Morning Work as they eat. Next, students discard breakfast trash and visit the bathroom. Then, students read the Morning Message and answer the daily problem. Back at their desks, students review and turn in the morning work, clear their desks, and read a book of choice.*

*By this time, students are listening to announcements. Students know to go directly to the rug and sit in a circle for our Morning Meeting as soon as the announcements are over. These routines and procedures provide students with a safe and predictable environment. Every second of every minute is purposeful.*

Patricia Candies  
St. Rose, Louisiana

### **Fifth Grade**

*I have begun each morning the same way since my very first day of teaching five years ago. I plan each morning the previous afternoon with a new schedule, a daily "I Can," and make sure my bellringer is changed and ready so students can immediately come in and get on task. My first key ingredient to a good morning is music (classical, "The Piano Guys"). I then stand at the door to greet students. As students work, I check attendance and prepare for my first lesson of the day! This is also a great time to walk around and make sure students seem visibly OK, and if not, I give a hug and kind words. Remember, the day is early and, as their teacher, you can make it brighter.*

Amanda Brooks Bivens  
Dyersburg, Tennessee

### **Second Grade**

*I learned at Ball State University to have a plan put into place for the first five minutes of class, the most crucial part of beginning a successful day of learning.*

*When the bell rings at 8:20 each morning and students are released to enter my classroom, I immediately meet them at the door to greet each one. This makes them feel welcome and invited to their learning environment. As they enter the classroom, they are met with a morning message on my easel giving them short and "to the point" steps on what to do when they enter. The first step is to hang their coats and backpacks up in their lockers, ensuring they have their "take home" folder in hand. Next is to find their seat, put their folder in their desk, get two pencils out, and sharpen them (if needed). Then, they know to quietly sit and begin working on their morning work/bell work activity. I always have this out ready on their desks each morning. Once they finish, they choose a book from the book bag on their chair, and read silently until I give them further directions.*

*Planning and posting the steps that students need to take each morning, greeting them at the door, and having a bellwork assignment for them to work on when they arrive can make for a great morning, and wonderful day of learning.*

Kasey Oetting  
Muncie, Indiana

## Third Grade

*As my third graders walk into our classroom, they say "Good Morning" to everyone, then put down their book bags. They proceed to read their morning message, the outcomes for the day, and their bellwork. They take their own attendance in Active Inspire, complete their bellwork, and eat their breakfast. While they are doing this, I can take care of other teacher duties, such as collecting notes/money or passing out office notes. I cannot visualize my classroom functioning without procedures and routines. Students need consistency and structure.*

Tiffany Landrum  
St. Rose, Louisiana

**How to teach all of these techniques can be found in *THE Classroom Management Book* ([www.EffectiveTeaching.com](http://www.EffectiveTeaching.com)).**

**Please share your "First Five Minutes" with us.**

Tell us

- what you do, specifying the steps you use,
- the grade level you teach,
- the subjects you teach,
- where you teach, and
- anything else you wish to share.

Send your story, along with a photo or two, if you wish, to

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**Thank you for improving the teaching profession and student achievement with effective practices!**