

“Predictable Daily Routines”

by Angela Powell

Excerpted and adapted from [“The Cornerstone: Classroom Management That Makes Teaching More Effective, Efficient, and Enjoyable”](#).

Establishing predictable routines is one of the foundational elements of good classroom management. That’s because children need structure, and most respond well to highly detailed systems. Kids are known for asking outlandish ‘what if’ questions (“What if lightning struck the school and broke the ovens in the cafeteria—would we still get to eat?”). Children like to know that there’s a plan in place for every eventuality. It makes them feel safe and confident because they know how they should respond...and how YOU, their fearless leader, will handle any problems that arise.

This chapter will describe in detail the major routines for your daily schedule that need to be established, and provide suggestions for creating procedures that meet the needs of you and your students. Remember that routines can and should be modified throughout the year, so nothing is ever set in stone. Decide on something you think will work, teach it to your students, and adapt it as needed, taking the time to explain to children why you are making changes and showing them exactly what you’d like them to do differently. The possibilities for classroom structure are varied, and you have a great deal of freedom to try new things when you know how to teach procedures effectively.

Arrival at School

When students first enter the classroom each morning, they should expect a predictable set of tasks to be awaiting them. This will set the tone for the entire day and communicate to children, “Welcome back. This is a safe, familiar place for you. You know exactly what to do, and you will be successful at meeting the expectations.” The morning should be a calm, quiet time (assuming that’s your preference) for you and the students to gear up for the school day.

The precise tasks you require of your students will depend on your school’s arrival system for students. One of the most influential factors is whether children will be slowly trickling in for fifteen to thirty minutes, or whether most will arrive all at once. If students come in slowly, you will need to have open-ended and ‘early finisher’ activities planned for students who have completed their tasks before other students even enter the room. This can be handled quite simply by having early arrivers read books quietly or get on the computers. If students come in all at once, you will need to design procedures to prevent chaos when students are unpacking, getting their chairs, and sharpening pencils. If your children line up outside your door in the morning, you can let five in at a time when the bell rings, and spend a moment greeting and talking with the others.

Regardless of your situation, you will still have many routine tasks you want students to complete: unstacking chairs, unpacking book bags, taking out homework and papers from home, using the bathroom, sharpening pencils, and so on. You will need to explain these things on the first day of school. I usually review them at the end of every day during the first week (“So, when you arrive in the classroom tomorrow morning, what are the things you will need to do?”). I also include them on my Morning Work list written on the board until students are able to recall and complete them routinely.

Returning to the Classroom From Lunch and Special Classes

Whenever students enter the classroom, they should be able to count on a predictable routine. That routine will depend on whether you want students to complete a task right away, or listen for your specific directions. You could have different procedures for specific times of the day: for example, when returning from specials, students may need to sit and wait for you to give directions for the science lesson, but when you return from lunch, you may want the class to take out their journals and immediately begin writing. Decide ahead of time what you want students to do each time they return to the classroom. Then explain, model, practice, and reinforce your procedures.

End of the School Day

Dismissal can be one of the most chaotic times of day, especially if students are dismissed slowly by their means of transportation home (bus riders, then daycare students, then car riders, and so on). That's unfortunate, because a hectic and stressful dismissal can leave the teacher feeling exhausted and unproductive, even if the majority of the day went well. Here are a few ideas for making the last transition of the day a smooth one:

- **Have structured routines so things don't end on a crazy note.**
- **Insist on absolute silence when dismissal announcements come over the loudspeaker.**
- **Have a visual reminder so students know which buses have been called.**



- **Keep a record of how students have been dismissed for the day.**





In Chapter 10 of [The Cornerstone](#), you'll learn how to:

- * Establish Morning Work procedures and choose appropriate assignments
- * Transition back into academics after lunch and special classes: train students to go directly to their seats, look at the board for assignments, and/or wait quietly for your directions
- * Implement the strategies you see in the photos above: create structure for the end of the school day, track which students have been dismissed, and get kids to be SILENT during bus call announcements (it is possible!).