

5 Common Teaching Challenges and Strategies to Overcome Them - Free Resource for Teachers



Disclaimer: *If you are a teacher reading this, you rock! This article consists of things I've learned on my journey to becoming better at teaching. After 24 years, I still have students fall asleep in my class, kids don't complete their school work on time, and some of my classes are really hard to manage. These are some things that have helped me, and I hope will help you as well. Yours in teaching solidarity, Jeremy.*

Here are some common teaching challenges along with some resources to help you tackle them.

- **Time Management:** Teachers have to manage their time effectively to cover the curriculum, assess students' progress, and attend to administrative tasks that seem to grow year after year. To overcome this challenge try taking a few minutes at the beginning of each day to prioritize the most important tasks that need doing. You'll be less likely to procrastinate if you develop a habit of taking breaks at regular intervals. Procrastination is like a credit card - it's a lot of fun until you get the bill. This TED Talk by Tim Urban does a great job of exploring the causes and impacts of procrastination.
- **Student Engagement:** Keeping students engaged and motivated is a challenge faced by teachers. In my classroom experience, this has become harder to do over the past five years. To overcome this challenge, try planning your lessons in regular intervals, making sure to leave time for brain breaks. Find ways to mix things up. Create a balance between independent and group work, technology work, analog work, and games (here's my favorite low-tech game). Even though teaching is tiring, students feed off of your energy. If you're animated and into instruction, students are more likely to be engaged. Taking care of yourself by getting plenty of sleep will help elevate your energy levels. Giving students choices can also increase engagement.
- **Classroom Management** - Managing a classroom full of students is a daunting task, but it can be made easier by setting up a classroom management plan that works for you. This plan should include clear rules and expectations that are communicated to the students. Consider using positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior and academic progress, and take the time to build positive relationships with each student. Support from colleagues and administrators will also be invaluable in managing a classroom. If possible, observe students in

different classrooms to see how your colleagues manage the room. It's alright to ask for help. Even the best teachers eventually need some help.

- **Assessment:** Assessing students' progress and providing feedback is essential to ensure learning outcomes are met. However, assessment can be time-consuming and challenging, particularly when dealing with large classes. To overcome this challenge, incorporate a variety of assessment strategies, such as formative and summative assessments, peer and self-assessment, and use [technology](#) to automate grading. Formative assessments are powerful and don't need to be time-consuming. Once a solid foundation is set, peer critique can also be a valuable part of your assessment strategy. [Portfolios](#) are a powerful tool for promoting self-reflection, goal-setting, and metacognition in elementary and middle school students.
- **Parent Communication:** Communicating with parents is crucial to ensure students' academic success. However, communicating with parents can be challenging, particularly when dealing with difficult or unresponsive parents. Start communicating with parents right at away at the beginning of the school year and then continue sending home information on a regular basis. You could send regular newsletters or updates and/or a class website or social media page. Using technology can help you reach parents in ways that work for them. Here are [7 tech tools](#) that can help improve teacher-parent communication.




Eight Ways to Build Relationships with Students to Start the School Year Off Right

One of the best investments of time a teacher can make is to build relationships with their students. When student/teacher relationships are strong students learn more and teachers are happier.

1. **Learn names and how to say them correctly.** Name tents are helpful for this. Students appreciate that you want to pronounce their names correctly. You can have them get creative and decorate their name tent with symbols/pictures representing who they are and then share that with you.
2. **Listen actively.** Model how you would like them to listen to you when you're talking. This is often challenging as there are so many things going on in the classroom at once. Whenever possible, look them in the eyes, listen, nod, and even ask them follow-up questions.
3. **Ask questions.** No one wants to be around someone who always talks about themselves and monopolizes conversations. This is true with students. Find moments to connect with all of your students one on one by asking them questions that are unrelated to school work. For some students, it will take more than one attempt, but those are usually the students who will eventually appreciate it the most.
4. **Assume the best.** This is a useful classroom norm. Tell students right from the beginning that you'll always assume the best and that you aren't looking to make their lives worse in any way. They will usually rise the level of your expectations, and when they don't it will be easier to recover.
5. **Prioritize classroom management.** Students feel like they can be themselves when they have a teacher with solid positive classroom management skills. In many ways, this should be at the top of this list. Establish routines and norms as soon as possible and practice them in a positive way. When things go awry, practice them some more.
6. **Give students a voice and choice.** When people have a voice and choice they feel valued. Teachers can strategically give students a voice and choice to build positive relationships. Simple choices could be where to sit or a menu of assignment options. Let them choose their partners sometimes. When students have a voice and choice they feel like someone believes in their abilities. Who doesn't like having someone believe in them?
7. **Be quick with praise.** Always be on the lookout for good things happening. Describe what you see, explain why it's awesome, and then offer up some praise. Students will notice that you are on the lookout for "good things" and as a result, you'll see more "good things" happening.

8. **Be a goldfish.** This phrase comes from the television show Ted Lasso. It simply means to have a short memory. People make mistakes every day. Students make more mistakes because they are supposed to. Use mistakes to teach lessons, move on, and don't hold a grudge. Try to treat each day as a new one. Share this with students in moments where discipline is needed. This is challenging to do, but the payoff is great.

Resources:

-  [The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher](#): This is great for teachers just starting out. I revisit it at the beginning of each year. This book will help you with managing your classroom and put solid routines into place.
-  [Keeping It Real and Relevant: Building Authentic Relationships in Your Diverse Classroom](#) - You'll find tips for balancing the needs of diverse learners, examples of classroom challenges and how to handle them, and questions that will further your professional development.
-  [Motivating Students Who Don't Care: Proven Strategies to Engage All Learners, \(Proven Strategies to Motivate Struggling Students and Spark an Enthusiasm for Learning\)](#) - Students who appear to lack motivation can be challenging to teach. This book offers strategies to spark enthusiasm in unmotivated students.

I've been wanting to put together this resource for me (and of course you) for some time. The school I teach at is an [EL Education](#) School. As part of our structure, we have [CREW](#) each day. This is our version of homeroom. This [book](#) explains it all.

The structure of crew allows for relationship building, academic progress monitoring, and character development. Crew allows students to build positive connections with their peers and with their crew leader. Crew leaders strategically plan crew to address and assess these multiple goals.

Each day we meet for the first 25 minutes of the school day to accomplish the Crew goals. It takes extra planning, but it's worth it. This list of activities will be updated over

time. I hope you find something that you can apply to your classroom. It really does help improve the culture and connections with my students.

School Culture Building Resources

- Every Crew/Homeroom begins with a reading and greeting. Sometimes the teacher leads and sometimes the students. We always start in a circle. Some of the best Crew meetings happen when students lead them.
- Habits of Scholarship Check - Each Monday students check their grades (We use Skyward) and missing assignments. They also check their email and Google Classroom assignment streams. We also check their planners, independent reading, and math fact progress.
- Fun, Food, and/or Gratitude - Each student shares one or more of these and sometimes they pass. We usually do this on a Monday.
- Each activity ends with a debrief where we look for takeaways and life lessons.
- Is use the [Kikori](#) app for some of my team-building activities. I won't list those here. It's a good resource. There are some quality activity playlists on this app.
- Create a "Thankful" list. This usually happens before Thanksgiving. But can happen anytime. Sometimes we call it a "Gratitude List".
- Watch "[Homework for Life](#)" by [Matthew Dicks](#). I recommend his [book](#) as well. The students complete their "Homework for Life" for a week and then craft a one-minute speech that they share with their crew/homeroom. We usually use the range between 1-3 minutes. I model a story for them. I tell them the story of when I was caught stealing at the Red Owl Grocery store. My mom took me to the police station and made me confess to Officer Friendly. It was tough this year because my daughter was in my class. I was diminished in her eyes.
- [The Thirty Day Challenge](#) - We watch [Matt Cutts](#) give his Thirty Day Challenge Ted Talk. After that students take time to think about something they would like to try or give up for the next thirty days. They track their progress in their planners and after thirty days we debrief. It leads to good conversations around goal setting and overcoming challenges.
- [3 A's of Awesome](#) - this is an inspirational talk focusing on Awareness, Authenticity, and Attitude.

- [33+ Team Building Activities for Kids](#) - A nice selection of team-building resources.
- Buddies - I teach 8th graders in a Pre-K - 8 school. Our 8th graders are paired with second graders. We get together for all sorts of fun activities throughout the year. It's a win-win. Second graders get an older student to interact with and 8th graders get leadership practice. Each student in our school has a buddy.
- [16 Team Building Activities For Middle School \(With Video Examples\)](#) - a resource I have bookmarked
- [5 Team-Building Activities in the Middle School Classroom Students Love](#) - a resource I have bookmarked
- [Team-Building Activities for Middle School](#) - bookmarked resource
- [Everyday Leadership](#) - Students learn what a "lollipop moment" is along with the power of simple positive actions. It's even better when they get a Tootsie Pop after watching, only if they agree to create a Lollipop Moment. When we work with our second-grade buddies we reference this video.
- [10 Fun Team-Building Activities for Middle School](#) - another resource I have bookmarked
- Book: [Team Challenges: 170+ Group Activities to Build Cooperation, Communication, and Creativity](#).
- Student SOLO - Solitude and Reflection - sometimes we try to take a pause from stress and commotion with a SOLO. It's good practice for students to learn how to slow down and be still. Check out the SOLO resource download at the end of this post.
- Beware of the procrastination monkey 🐒. I try to save [this video](#) for the end of the year when we start to get ready for portfolio passage presentations. It's funny and the message conveyed is helpful for students who might struggle with deadlines. It's also helpful for me to rewatch it each year.
- 🧠 Game - Head, Shoulders, Knees, Cup - Students pair off. The teacher randomly says either head, shoulders, knees, or cup. When the students hear cup they have to grab the cup in front of them before their opponent. The winner pairs off against another winner until there is only one student remaining.

- STEM Challenges - Turn your classroom into a Makerspace and provide students with design and engineering challenges. [Maker education](#) provides an avenue to help students build their social-emotional skills.

Resources:

- Book: [101 Team Building Exercises: To Improve Cooperation and Communication](#)
- Book: [Teambuilding With Teens: Activities for Leadership, Decision Making, and Group Success](#)
- Book: [The Big Book of Team Building Games: Trust-Building Activities, Team Spirit Exercises, and Other Fun Things to Do](#)

I hope you found this information and resources helpful. Visit my website - [Why Edify](#) for more articles like this one. Teachers are difference-makers. Thank you for all that you do.

Jeremy