



*Thank you*

FOR YOUR  
INTEREST IN  
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Answers to Your Biggest Questions About Creating a Dynamic Classroom*.

[LEARN MORE](#) about this title!

CORWIN



# How Can I Ensure Engagement and Get Ahead of Off-Task Behaviors?

Off-task behavior can manifest in multiple forms—sleeping student, talkative student, sudden outbursts, or teasing. You get the idea . . . and you've likely seen these behaviors in a classroom. When these types of behaviors arise, there is a good chance students are bored or, on the flip side, intimidated by the material. Or perhaps they know the material, but they do not want to look interested due to negative peer pressure. There are a multitude of reasons for off-task behavior. Ultimately, the student is not engaged and may be disrupting the learning environment.

How do we get ahead of off-task behaviors? Engage the students with simple strategies that can be done with all learners throughout the lesson. The following strategies keep you one or two steps ahead of your class and keep engagement high.

Something as simple as bringing your authentic self to the classroom can get engagement going before, during, or even after a lesson. For example, you could share a story with them about when you lack interest in something; this will build trust, and students will relate with you.

Solutions to build engagement and prevent off-task behaviors:

- ③ **Proximity:** Slowly move away from the front of the room and stand close to the student; this is a nonverbal cue that can prompt the student to resume their task.
- ③ **Asking questions:** Engage your class using open-ended questions as you are teaching. Have students discuss with a partner and then share out.
- ③ **Adjusting pacing:** Make sure to be aware of your students' behavior. If they are sleeping, speed up your instruction. If they have blank stares, this may indicate you are going too fast.
- ③ **Limiting direct instruction time:** Consider chunking your lessons into 10-minute increments—10 minutes for direct instruction, 10 minutes for you and your students to work together, 10 minutes for partner or small-group work, and 10 minutes for independent work.
- ③ **Integrating movement:** Even three minutes of exercise can engage their minds and bodies. Better yet if you can link the movement with curriculum to review material.
- ③ **Student interests:** Incorporate their interests into your lessons.
- ③ **Humor:** Have fun with the students. Relate a personal story that conveys empathy or a story about how you may have had trouble with particular aspects of the content. (Note: Make sure your humor is not sarcastic; this can be detrimental to your students' self-esteem, and some students, especially younger children or those who show neurodiversity, may not understand sarcasm.)

- ③ **Being prepared for early finishers:** Have something ready for students who complete a task ahead of others. For more on early finishers, please see Chapter 3.
- ③ **Peer teaching:** Give your students opportunities to teach one another. They love to talk, and they learn a great deal more hearing it from more than one person, especially when it is from their peers.
- ③ **Call-and-response:** This can help you get students' attention quickly. The teacher says a common phrase and the students finish it. This is most effective when it is taught and practiced in the first few days of school as a routine.
  - ③ Example: Teacher: Macaroni and cheese . . . Students: Everybody freeze!
  - ③ Example: Teacher: And a hush fell across the room . . . Students: Shhh!  
(For more creative call-and-response ideas, scan the QR code in the margin.)
- ③ **Consistent structure:** Structure the first and last 10 minutes of your class so students know exactly how they begin and end class.
- ③ **Aural cues:** Use a chime to get students' attention so you don't have to yell (yelling creates or can set off particularly anxious students).
- ③ **Visual cues:** Post routines around the room so students have visual cues and you don't have to repeat yourself.
- ③ **Being one step ahead:** Pass out papers and materials to groups *before* class if possible. Often, taking too much time to pass out papers during a lesson can disrupt the flow of a lesson, and students can become disengaged.

### Tip #1

When engaging your students with open-ended questioning, use ice-pop sticks with their names on them or draw their names from a container. Or you can use a spinner with class names on it, roll a dice, or pull a card with a number on it that correlates to a student. Make participating fun!

### Tip #2

Remember, if a student is showing signs that they are struggling to voice the answer, give them a break and allow someone else to answer your question. A student who struggles academically in class may shut down by putting their head on the desk.

### Tip #3

Consider creating with your students hand signals accompanied by voice signals for students to follow. This will limit your talking and hold students accountable to pay close attention. If you want to be courageous, try not talking but relying on signals from the entire class to make it fun when they are learning them. Students love to decipher your improv skills as well!



Creative Call-and-Response Ideas  
(Watson, 2014)

<https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/50-fun-call-and-response-ideas-to-get-students-attention/>

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

