



Teaching Skills 101: A Quick Start to Effective Independent Learning (and How to Maintain Pupil Focus)

A strong start to the lesson involves an effective routine to get pupils into their seats and ready to learn (see Teaching Skills Resources [TSR] 31) with a minimum of fuss. It should involve a starter (TSR 6) and Learning Objectives (TSR 61 and 102) but not too much teacher talk. You will want to move on to the first part of the main task quickly. This will very probably require some instruction. Ensure that your transition from the starter / LO explanation is time delimited, especially if any movement is involved (e.g. from carpet time in primary, or to a demonstration point in Science, Technology or P.E., etc.). Keep any instructions as brief as possible, especially if it follows from a teacher-led starter / register / LO explanation of more than 4 or 5 minutes. Aim to keep any *CONSECUTIVE* period of teacher talk in the lesson *shorter than 10 minutes* in duration; that means you should aim to instruct for only 5 or 6 minutes after a talk-led starter. Ensure that you bring pupils back to attentive listening (eyes on you, pens down) after each transition / break in independent work. Support a quick return to attentive listening with a 30 second pre-warning of the call for quiet, and then use an attention grabber (a great attention grabber is a count down with interspersed tactical praise – e.g. “5, 4, well done Billy, well done the front table, you are already ready, 3, thank-you Sarah and Rashan, 2, 1, well done everyone on the middle table... and we are just waiting for Josh and Jasmine, ready? Great! Thank-you...” and then give your instructions.

Any *whole-class instructions* should be consistently given *from one place at the front* of the classroom (or near your whiteboard etc.) so that pupils begin to associate the fact that you are in that spot with the likelihood that you are about to talk to the class. Once you have completed your instructions, set the class straight to work, telling them *how long they have* for the task and that you will remind them when they are half way through the set time. This will help *create a sense of urgency*, with the time available a part of the level of challenge. There will possibly be a small number of students who need further explanation. *Once everyone else has started work*, ask these pupils to identify themselves and come to you for that support. Then set them on task and begin to move around the classroom to monitor progress, support and guide as necessary. Get down to the pupils' physical level to support them, but frequently (every 30 seconds or so) *raise yourself to scan* the room to check focus / engagement, ensuring that pupils see you maintaining this routine consistently. Reinforce your 'no calling out' rule by giving attention to those complying with expectations (e.g. with their hands up if they want support), and praising them loud enough for those shouting out to hear (tactical praise). Keep any communication about individual praise for attainment or *individual behaviour concerns* between you and the pupil concerned. *Go to the pupil* in question and talk to them quietly to *avoid them 'loosing face'*. That way you are more likely to get the result you are seeking.

Behaviour challenges are best approached from an *under-performance point of view* as it is easier and more constructive to create a cooperative / positive 'team' dynamic to 'help the pupils reengage and catch-up on their learning' rather than you TELLING him / her what they have done wrong. A calm, positive approach reduces the risk of confrontation.

By half way through the first main task you should have been able to judge the rate of progress being made if you have circulated to monitor progress etc. If you have given pupils 20 minutes, but after 10 minutes you see that the middle to high ability pupils are only 5 minutes from finishing, be prepared to tell the class that they only have 5 minutes left, so concluding the task early. Conversely, if the middle to high ability pupils are all behind the expected pace because they are working hard and achieving deep learning, be prepared to give the half-time reminder a few minutes late, even if it means that a later, small task is delayed / shortened / omitted if appropriate.

To conclude the first main task, use the attention grabber technique describe above. When pupils are all listening attentively, recognise their hard work and complete a short, interim plenary to check understanding before repeating the instruction, deadline, extra support, circulation, scanning and positive challenge processes for the next / second task. Leave time for a fuller plenary to check understanding / progress made against the LOs towards the end of the lesson. Use a routine for a calm lesson conclusion and exit.