

# How to Limit Tardies Without Losing Your Mind

Mr. Goodie-Two-Shoes here...sorry...but I might have just a handful of tardies a month. I teach 4 honors classes now, but switching from the "regular" classes to honors classes didn't impact the number of tardy students I have. I'd like to share with you a few things that I do that I believe contribute to students being on time.

## 1. Fake It 'til You Make It

A few years ago, or so I heard on an episode of Freakonomics (awesome podcast), Stanford University made a video featuring upperclassmen sharing what they did as freshmen when they started to struggle academically. They said they studied, made friends with good students in their classes, went to tutoring and office hours, went to bed instead of going to parties and so on. The video was shown to incoming freshmen and there was a significant academic improvement. The thing is...the video was fake, the students lied.

You just have to tell the lie once, if you follow through with the rest of it. Just say, "Students are on time to my class! We start class on time here, that's how we roll."

Now you may be wondering if I'm telling the truth about the low number of tardies in my room, and I am. However, I have used this Fake It 'til You Make It method for other things, like improving homework completion, but that's another story.

Part of the lore I establish in the students minds is done by planting the seed in their head that being the last person to class is embarrassing. I tell them to notice that it is generally the case that the kids who show up last have the lowest grades and are the lowest achieving. (Not always the case depending on the location of the previous class, I explain. However, it is particularly true for first period and just after lunch.) The reason this is, I explain, is because their heads aren't in the game. They're preoccupied with the silly teen-drama that transpires in the hall.

"It's embarrassing to be last."

## 2. Establish the Expectation

With clarity and direct communication, make sure the students know what is expected of them, and do so with both the positive and negative statements (Be on time, don't be

late). This should be an early-year focus, when you establish your procedures and expectations.

Being specific here is incredibly important. I spend quite a bit of time explaining that to be on time the students needs to be seated and ready when the bell rings. On the board, before every class, I have instructions regarding what they need to have ready for the day. On occasion I ask them to do "bell work," but that is not my routine. Running in the door, standing around the room, or anything else short of being ready when the bell rings is a failure to meet the expectation and they're tardy.

Signs on the wall about tardy policy, marking students tardy and even complaining to and yelling at them will not help. In fact, if a student is always late and you fail to address them directly and clearly, they have successfully lowered your expectation of their behavior. Further, they're now in control of establishing classroom norms! But the classroom norms and group behavior are another topic, and a huge one at that. More on that in the future.

### **3. Start Class on Time**

If you're talking with your neighbor teacher, checking email, or watching reading this on the internet when the tardy bell rings you are failing to fulfill your own expectation!

While it irks me when people say, "Teachers are just as bad as students," the sentiment is applicable here. You are the leader of the classroom. As leader of the classroom, you set the expectations through example!

So, to help with this be visible before class starts, have clear expectations for what is expected for the day on the board (if it is something that varies from the norm), and welcome them to class. When the tardy bell rings, don't sit down immediately and take attendance. Instead, start class by introducing the schedule for the day, reviewing homework, or with a welcoming conversation. You'll find a moment of time when you can record attendance early in class, and I often ask the students to help me identify who is absent when that moment comes. (Sometimes I have the students practice something brief, retry a homework problem, check an answer with someone, or something along those lines and take attendance then.)

### **4. Incentives for Punctuality**

I don't believe students should be given candy for doing a basic thing that they should do anyway. However, a show of gratitude can go a long way! Just thanking a student who is always ready on time is a positive reinforcement that really helps kids be on time. Or, perhaps mid-year, try explaining to students that it is important to you that

class begins on time and thanking them for being punctual reinforces that the expectation is to be on time.

If you have a class that is made up of students that love to be late, use some positive peer pressure. Offer to add 5% to the week's quiz if all students can be on time for a certain number of days. Write it on the board before class, make it a production. If the extra credit thing doesn't work for you offer something else, (I believe it is a scourge in education because it is used to help students get grades in place of learning). The idea is, do not take their good behavior for granted. If they're playing ball with you, acknowledge that.

## **5. Consistent Reprimand**

A friend of mine has students write a one page tardy essay every time they are tardy. Another used to make students stand at the back of the classroom for the entire period if they were late. Another still assigns lunch detention. They're all good if they're done consistently. However, I prefer to use peer pressure and a bit of embarrassment.

First off, if a student is late they do not get to walk into the classroom as though it is the passing period. I stop them at the door. Now, this is a bit difficult to articulate in writing, but it is important you consider the nature of the student. It matters not to me why they're late, they need to be on time, but sometimes they have a reasonable excuse. After hearing the reason for tardiness from a student that is usually punctual I will reiterate the expectation and importance of punctuality.

Sometimes, if it is a kid who has a boyfriend or girlfriend that causes them to be late, I won't ask for a reason but will tell them they need a new boy/girl friend, one that cares about their future, "...not one who is selfish and only interested in their own entertainment at your expense. What are you, a play thing? What happens when they're tired of you and then you're lonely and uneducated?" And again, this is said for all to hear.

Yet, a little grace upon occasion can go a long way to promoting your desired end result, students being on time. Sometimes a student is obviously having a BAD day ... and you don't want to start a fight, you want to teach class and have them be on time so you can better do that. So, sometimes a gentler approach is better. After hearing why a student is late (which is done with the full class as audience), I often ask them if they can do me a favor and show up on time tomorrow.

I hope you found this helpful. Thank you for reading. If you have questions or comments, please leave them below. And subscribe for updates on the blog.

