

*A Guide From*  
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# Avoiding the common mistake of killing your students with rules and procedures on the first day



If you're reading this guide, you're probably already turned off by the idea of spending your first day of class going over all your rules and procedures. If that still sounds like a good idea to you, here are some reasons I choose not to do that:

- Kids get bored to death
- They won't remember all that stuff anyway since they're bombarded with it (compounded if their other teachers are doing the same thing)
- Sometimes students' schedules are still changing the first few days, so you end up with a handful of students who missed all your rules and procedures

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## My System

Here's the gist of my system for avoiding these problems: Sprinkle the explaining and modeling of your rules and procedures over several days. Bring them up with each period when they become relevant. At the end, quiz the students.

Details...

### Step 1: Create a checklist of rules and procedures for each period

Because you may end up teaching different rules/procedures to different periods on different days, this checklist helps you keep track of which rules you've already gone over.

Just a simple table will do - you can even do it by hand.

Example of my checklist table:

	Per 1	Per 2	Per 3	Per 4	Per 5	Per 6		
bathroom								
trash								
warmup								

(If you want this Word doc table, [click here to download it.](#))

I draw mine by hand in the lower corner of my whiteboard so it's easily accessible to me.

### Step 2: Address each rule/procedure throughout the week when relevant

When you go over that rule with that period, you check it off.

When do you go over a rule?

- **When a student asks about it**

If a student wants to know, it's relevant. You might even prime students to ask. For example,

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on the first day one of my activities is to have students read [letters from previous years' students](#) and a letter may mention my “food bans”, then a student may ask about that (prompting me to explain my food policy).

- **As the rule/procedure is needed**

Explain the bathroom policy when a student asks to use the bathroom (just don't take too long haha). Explain the cell phone policy when you see a student using hers without permission (and that might be the only freebie anyone in that period ever gets - I've written extensively about [my cell phone policy](#)). Waiting for these occasions naturally spreads out the explanations as well as increases the chances students will internalize them since the relevancy is higher.

- **When it's checked off for other periods**

If I've gone over a rule with several periods but it hasn't been brought up with a last period, I'll explain it to the last period just to make sure every period is caught up. This helps make sure the periods aren't getting too lopsided in terms of certain periods getting way behind. I try to heighten the relevancy by mentioning other classes asked about it. “Oh, let's go over the food policy right now since other classes were asking about it today.”

For a procedure that you know will take longer to teach, you may want to spread those out through the week ahead of time.

Meanwhile, you can start on your curriculum or do other start-of-the-year activities you might have already planned, such as getting-to-know-you activities to build rapport. You're in a better position than I am to judge what works better in your school environment. If you're new to your school (or new to teaching), I suggest asking a respected colleague what they do the first week.

### **Step 3: Quiz the students at the end of the week**

The purpose of this quiz is **not** to scare your students or be used as a “gotcha” to see if they've been paying attention all week. The purpose of this quiz is to make sure that *you* know that *they* know the rules. This drives many of my decisions on how this quiz is administered and evaluated.

First, I provide students the rules on paper to keep with them. Some rules are also posted around the classroom (for example, the bathroom policy posted next to the bathroom pass). Wait -- isn't that just giving them the answers? To me, it actually doesn't matter if they hadn't learned all the rules up to this point - as long as they can look at the paper or look around the room to find out what the rule is. Basically, at this point, if the student doesn't already know the rule, they know they have resources for looking up the rule. This accommodates for students who may have enrolled late in my class due to changing schedules.

Also, aligning with my purpose of having the student know the rules, if the student misses a question, he can correct it for full credit. I have the students self-grade the quiz in class, then I give students a

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few minutes to make corrections (so there's really no point in cheating). During that time, students are allowed to (and encouraged to) ask me and fellow students questions and help each other out.

My quizzes are multiple choice, with questions that try to target common things I want to emphasize with the rules. For example, students generally know not to leave trash in my classroom, but the most common trash in my classroom is gumwrappers, so I'll put a simple true/false question: *True or False - Gum wrappers are not considered trash and it's okay to leave them on the desks or floor.* Duh - the answer is obvious, but having them circle the correct answer is better confirmation for both parties that the student understands the rule (better confirmation than a signature that supposedly means they read a class contract).

If you're not comfortable having a rules quiz be part of a student's grade (like if you do standards/mastery-based grading), an option is to make their "exit ticket" a quiz with all correct answers.

The priority here is as much as possible to have every student eventually show they understand (at least on paper) the parts of the rules and procedures you need them to. There's not much point in knowing a student got 50% and just putting it in the gradebook and accepting that he didn't have a good grasp of your rules, compared to letting that student go over his incorrect answers and showing you he corrected them and now has a better understanding of your rules.

That's it!

I'd love to hear feedback about what you think of this guide, whether you try this in your classroom, and how it works out for you. If you like this, please share it!

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