

Schedules and Routines



In the weeks leading up to my first year of teaching, I focused mostly on two things. First, I had to get the physical layout of the room set. I inherited a classroom from a teacher who, over the course of twenty years, had accumulated multiple textbooks, curricular materials, trade books, reams of paper, and other supplies. I needed to sort through everything and decide what to keep and how best

to arrange the room (which we discussed in Chapter 1).

My other focus was on the curriculum I was about to teach. I knew that I wanted to use a workshop approach to reading and writing, so I needed to gather enough books for a class library and have notebooks ready for writing. I also spent time looking over and getting ready to teach the first units in science, social studies, and math. By the first day of school, I felt pretty ready.

The things I neglected to focus on, however, were the schedules and routines of the classroom. That was a mistake! As I was soon to learn, a daily schedule is like the skeleton of the classroom—it supports everything else that happens throughout the day. And if the schedule is the skeleton of the classroom, then routines are its lifeblood. Students enter the classroom and put away backpacks and homework. They greet friends and check the schedule. Later in the day, they transition from one subject to another, from snack to recess, and from lunch back into the classroom, with these routine activities sustaining the ebb and flow of life in the room.

Math, science, literacy, music, physical education, and all the other subjects demand much of our attention when teaching fifth graders. Yet, because schedules and routines have such a huge impact on students' learning, we need to deliberately plan and teach them, just as we plan and teach academic content.



Life in our classrooms can be frustrating and inefficient. Or it can be calm and orderly, giving fifth graders a sense of stability and leading them to productive learning. The difference is in how we set up schedules and routines and teach them to students. This chapter will give you effective ways to set up schedules and routines with fifth graders in mind. You'll also learn a great way to teach routines. And you'll get ideas that will enable the school day to flow smoothly for students—and for you.

Scheduling

As you begin to craft your schedule, you'll find that certain things may already be established. For example, the midday break for recess and lunch will probably be set, as will the specials schedule for the week (art, music, physical education, library, computer, and so on).

34

You'll also discover that some parts of the schedule may be somewhat flexible. For example, the reading specialist may approach you to find out when she can come into your classroom to support four students as they read. This teacher is likely trying to coordinate her time with other teachers in the building as well. So you may want to collaborate with the other fifth grade teachers to plan times that work well for everyone—adjusting them as needed throughout the year—to ensure that students get the reading support they need while minimizing disruptions.

Then there will be other times of the day that are completely flexible. For example, you may be able to choose when a science block can take place. Our goal should be to make the best use of what flexibility we do have to create classroom schedules that are most conducive to joyful and challenging learning for students.

Think about Fifth Graders' Needs

Fifth graders are social. Fifth graders are growing. Fifth graders can go with the flow. These are just a few of their common characteristics to keep in mind as you plan a daily schedule. Here are some specific suggestions:

- **Provide frequent breaks.** Fifth graders may struggle if they have to wait until the middle of the day for one long recess and lunch break. Instead, include a couple of short breaks throughout the day to give them multiple chances to connect with friends, get some physical movement, and reenergize for more learning.
- **Alternate silent and interactive periods of the day.** If possible, avoid having back-to-back learning activities that require students to work silently on their own. Instead, try to alternate periods of quiet solo work with more interactive learning time. For example, after students have read silently during reading workshop, they'll appreciate engaging in a science project where they get to chat as they work.
- **Build in a little social time for transitions.** I've caught myself challenging students to transition from one subject to the next without talking. In fifth grade, we might as well challenge them to not breathe! If we tell students they should put away their math work and get out their social studies research folders without talking to one another, we're going to be fighting a losing battle all year. Instead, build in an extra minute or two for students to talk as they transition. Use interactive modeling (see pages 37–41) to teach them how to keep conversations brief and how to refocus as they move on to the next activity.

■ **Make time to eat.**

Whether you plan official snack times or allow students to eat throughout the day, be sure to consider this important aspect of the day. Some students will come to school hungry, not having had enough (or any) breakfast. Most students will need to eat a couple of times during the school day,

Easing the Recess-to-Classroom Transition

- **Recess first.** Exercising and then eating fits how children's (and adults') bodies naturally work. When physical needs are met, behavior generally improves. If your school schedules lunch first, you may want to suggest trying it the other way around.
- **Quiet time.** Consider having ten to fifteen minutes of silent, independent work time after students enter the room from recess and lunch. They can read, draw, catch up on homework, or work on a math or word puzzle. This quiet time helps children shift gears.
- **Read-aloud.** Listening to a good book together right after recess and lunch can ease any ruffled feelings and help the group settle into the afternoon. See the appendix (pages 113–117) for some favorite fifth grade read-alouds.

in addition to their lunch period, to keep their energy high for learning. Growing and learning take a lot of energy, and we need to make sure students stay fueled up.

■ **Talk with colleagues and school leaders about the frequency of changing classes.** Fifth grade often marks the year when students start changing classes. Students can benefit by experiencing such changes (for example, when changing teachers for math and science). However, too many changes can be difficult for students to adjust to socially and emotionally; they can also be very challenging for teachers to manage. If your school's fifth graders are changing classes a lot, talk with other teachers and school leaders about finding a productive balance.

The following schedules give you two possible starting points for building your own schedule.

Two Ideal Schedules

36

8:30–8:40	Arrival Routine
8:40–9:00	Morning Meeting
9:00–9:55	Math
9:55–10:05	Snack Break
10:05–11:05	Reading Workshop
11:05–12:00	Social Studies
12:00–12:45	Recess and Lunch
12:45–1:05	Read-aloud
1:05–1:45	Writing Workshop
1:45–1:55	Snack Break
1:55–2:35	Science or Social Studies
2:35–3:20	Special
3:20–3:30	Dismissal Routine

8:30–8:40	Arrival Routine
8:40–9:05	Morning Meeting
9:05–10:05	Science
10:05–10:20	Recess
10:20–11:30	Literacy*
11:30–12:30	Special
12:30–1:15	Recess and Lunch
1:15–2:15	Math
2:15–3:00	Social Studies*
3:00–3:20	Read-aloud
3:20–3:30	Dismissal Routine

* Students may eat while working during these periods.

Teaching Classroom Routines

We might assume that because fifth graders have been going to school for so long, they already know what to do on the first day of their new school year with us. That's what I thought when I first started teaching fifth grade:

Weren't my students old enough to know, for example, how to line up quietly without a lot of explanation? But in fact, all elementary students, including those in fifth grade, need to be taught how to line up. And how to raise their hand when they have a question, how to turn in their homework, and so on. After all, students can forget about school routines over the long summer. They probably also had different teachers the previous year, each of whom likely had different expectations and routines.



Certainly, fifth graders will know more than younger grade children, and we should honor this knowledge. But when we take the time to teach students the routines of this classroom, for this year, they're more likely to be comfortable and successful. As a result, the learning environment will be more relaxed and efficient. Teaching classroom routines is one of our most important jobs with fifth grade students, especially at the beginning of the school year.

Use Interactive Modeling to Teach Routines

Before we get into which classroom skills and routines are most important to teach in fifth grade, let's first look at how to teach skills and routines. A simple and effective way is to use interactive modeling. This technique gives students the opportunity to think about, observe, discuss, and practice the skills needed to perform classroom routines independently. The table on the next page shows what the steps of interactive modeling might look and sound like if you were teaching students how to put calculators back in the class storage bin.

Interactive Modeling: Putting Away Calculators

Steps to Follow	Might Sound/Look Like
1 Describe a positive behavior you will model.	"After we use the calculators, we need to put them away carefully so they'll stay in good condition throughout the year. I'm going to model that. Watch what I do."
2 Model the behavior.	Place the calculator in the bin, just the way you want students to do it. You don't need to say anything or narrate what you're doing. Describing your actions can make it harder for students to focus on them.
3 Ask students what they noticed.	"What were some ways I was careful as I put away my calculator?" Students might say, "You put it in gently" or "You placed it to the side of the container so more can fit in."
4 Ask student volunteers to model the same behavior.	"Let's have a couple of you give it a try. Who would like to show us how to put a calculator away carefully?"
5 Ask students what they noticed. (Repeat steps 4 and 5 with other student volunteers as needed.)	"What were some ways that Cam, Tonya, and Maci were careful as they put their calculators in the bin?" Students name specific behaviors that were demonstrated.
6 Have the class practice.	"Now it's time for the rest of you to try. I'll call you up a few at a time and you can put your calculators away."
7 Provide feedback.	"Right on! These calculators are all stacked neatly in the bin. They were also placed there carefully. If we put calculators away like this, they'll last us all year!"

Keys to Successful Interactive Modeling

CLEARLY ARTICULATE ROUTINES FOR YOURSELF

An important first step of modeling something well for students is to clearly articulate for ourselves what the routine should look like. I remember once saying to a class of students that they needed to “be quiet” during transitions within the classroom. As students were moving about, some students were talking with each other, some were whispering, and some weren’t making any sound at all. As some students’ voices started to get louder, I tried reminding them to keep their voices down, but I also realized that I wasn’t sure myself how loud their voices should be. If I wasn’t sure, how could they be? I decided I needed to reteach this routine, and I had to start by figuring out exactly what voice level would be okay so that I could model this for students.

MAKE SURE EXPECTATIONS ARE REALISTIC

Be careful about setting standards that are too high. In the previous example, to require fifth graders to transition silently in the classroom is probably unrealistic. Can they do it? Sure. But the amount of time and energy that will be spent trying to enforce silent transitions will likely lead to constant frustration for both teachers and students. It’s even hard for adults to follow a “be silent” rule. And why should fifth graders have to be silent anyway? Isn’t the goal of being quiet to make sure that other students can stay focused and to preserve a calm environment? If that’s the goal, teach students how to whisper or talk quietly so that they can chat with friends while not disturbing others as they move about the classroom.

BE CONSISTENT

Once you’ve modeled and practiced routines that are realistic and age-appropriate, make sure to hold students accountable for them. If students are allowed to whisper while walking, yet three students are chatting and laughing in regular voices, redirect them to get them back on track. If many students are having trouble with an expected behavior, you may want to repeat the interactive modeling process for that behavior. When we consistently hold students accountable for an expected level of behavior, they feel safe and secure, knowing that there are limits.

DRAW ON FIFTH GRADERS' EXPERIENCE

One of the key principles of interactive modeling is to not assume that students already know how the classroom routines will work. Yet, don't assume that they know nothing. In fact, fifth graders begin the year with a considerable amount of school experience. You can draw on this as you model and practice key routines, reinforcing for students that they're older and more competent, while also teaching them specific, positive behaviors. For exam-

ple, when modeling how to walk quietly, you might say, "What are some strategies that you use to remind yourself to stay quiet as you walk?" Allowing students to share their ideas and expertise is both empowering and affirming.

Transitioning to Greater Independence

Something that often happens in fifth grade (especially if fifth grade is the highest grade in the school) is that we start to let behavior standards slip. Maybe we want to give fifth graders more independence, so we send them off to navigate the school day without providing enough support or guidance.

Regardless of the reason, we must insist on high standards of behavior for fifth graders. We need to let them be more independent than they were in the lower grades, but still teach them appropriate behaviors and keep a watchful eye and ear. For example, in middle school, these children will be traveling the halls by themselves, not with their teachers.

So we can start to empower them by gradually giving them more responsibility in this area: "You're all old enough to start walking in the halls without having to go in a line everywhere. Next year, in the middle school, you'll need to get from class to class without adults walking you there. We're going to start practicing a new routine for walking in the hallway this week. What are some things you'll need to keep in mind so that you're taking care of yourselves and others when I'm not there?"

In this way, as the school year progresses, you can maintain high expectations, but start to shift those expectations, helping fifth graders become more independent, responsible, and self-disciplined.

PROVIDE ONGOING REINFORCEMENT AND REMINDING

Students will need support as they continue to practice the behaviors you taught. When the class does well, reinforce the positive behavior: "That trip from our classroom to the art room was spot-on. People were whispering so that kids in other classes could stay focused on learning. That's just the way it should sound!"

If a routine has been especially tough for a particular student, you might pull that child aside for a private reinforcement when he or she does well: "Jenny, I know that you've been working at keeping your voice quiet as we walk in the halls. Did you notice



how well you just did that? You even kept your voice to a whisper when Ms. Rodriguez greeted you as we passed the office!”

Watch how students are doing and offer quick refreshers when needed: “Yesterday, I noticed that our voices were starting to get very loud as we got close

to the gym. Remember to keep using soft voices until we’re at our destination.” Model the routine again if necessary.

Key Routines to Teach

Transitioning within the classroom and walking in the hallways are just some of the many skills and routines to teach and practice with students. The following sections outline other key categories of routines to teach, including more on transitions. When you take the time to teach students the appropriate times and ways to sharpen pencils, use the bathroom, move chairs about the room, and carry out other classroom routines, the school day runs more smoothly. And in so doing, you’re creating an environment that allows for great learning.

SIGNALS FOR ATTENTION

Signals seem so basic, yet they’re profoundly important. If students are to move smoothly throughout the school day, you need to set up respectful and efficient ways of getting their attention. Students also need to know how to get your attention in respectful and efficient ways as they work and play.

Effective Use of Signals

- **Use signals that can work in a variety of settings.** Complex or multiple signals can lead to inconsistent responses.
- **Expect a quick, not an instantaneous, response.** You don’t need to demand immediate attention, which can feel disrespectful to students and create power struggles. Instead, give students about 15 seconds to stop what they’re doing before they respond.
- **Wait until every student responds to the signal before you speak.** Don’t speak until everyone is quiet. Be consistent: Mean what you say and say what you mean.



42

The best signals are simple visual and auditory ones. When students see or hear the signal, they complete their work or conversations within 15 seconds or so, turn their bodies toward the person who gave the signal, and remain quiet. The consistent use of signals such as the following will help the classroom become a calm, respectful learning environment.

- **Visual signal.** Simply raising your hand and waiting until all students are listening is an incredibly effective signal to use with fifth graders. Teach students that when they see your raised hand, they quickly wrap up their conversations and work, get quiet, and look at you, so that you can address the class.
- **Auditory signal.** A raised hand won't work if students are so engrossed in their work that no one is looking at you. So use a chime, bell, rain stick, or some other pleasant-sounding instrument to get the attention of the group in these instances. As with the visual signal, model and practice exactly what students should do to follow this signal, and then hold students to that standard. Remind or redirect them, or repeat the interactive modeling, as needed.
- **Student signal.** How should students get your attention when they have a question or need help? What if they raise their hand and you don't see it? What if they need help but you're working with another group? Make sure students know how to get your attention in respectful ways. Model and practice these routines, and then stick to them. For example, students

might sign up on a conference board when they need to meet with you, but you're busy helping someone else. One teacher I know has students put something (a bright piece of paper or card) on the table near where they're working to signal that they need help.

Also be sure to tell students that it is always OK for them to come directly over to you if they're having an emergency, rather than use a signal. Teach and model how to come quickly and calmly over to you during these times.

BEGINNING OF THE DAY

Consider the many tasks that children have to do to start off their school day: get breakfast in the cafeteria, fill out their lunch ticket, get a note from home signed in the office, return a library book, hang up their backpack and coat, pass in their homework, and read the morning message and follow its directions. When you think about all the details involved in accomplishing these tasks efficiently, it's no wonder that students need some guidance.

To help students get off to a smooth start and be prepared for learning, try working with the class to list all the tasks that they need to do as they start the school day. Decide if some tasks can be moved to less hectic times of the day. Next, use interactive modeling to teach students the most challenging tasks (or reteach the ones they're having the most trouble with). Finally, make and post anchor charts of the morning tasks to serve as reminders. When students know what to do (and how to do it), everyone will have a much better start to the day!

MORNING ROUTINE

Remember to ...

- ✓ Hang up coats.
- ✓ Take snacks out of backpacks.
- ✓ Pass in homework.
- ✓ Pass in any notes from home.
- ✓ Do morning errands.
- ✓ Use the bathroom.
- ✓ Fill out lunch ticket.
- ✓ Read morning message.
- ✓ Join in meeting area for morning meeting.

43

Sample Start-of-Day Anchor Chart



RECESS AND LUNCH

The midday break for recess and lunch can be a great time for students to connect with friends, get a little exercise, play some games, and recharge their batteries for an afternoon of learning. Unfortunately, it can also be a time of day marked by teasing, exclusion, and confusing guidelines and rules. You can help ensure that this time of day goes well for students by focusing on these key routines:

- How to fill out a lunch ticket
- Where to put lunch boxes during recess
- How to know whether to bring a coat outside
- What to do if someone gets hurt on the playground
- How to line up when recess is over
- How to move safely and considerately through the lunch line
- How to know where to sit in the cafeteria
- How to join a lunch table and how to welcome someone to the lunch table
- How to reenter the classroom for the afternoon

Use interactive modeling to teach these routines, and make anchor charts and post them as reminders for students. For more on recess and lunch, see Chapter 3, “Building Community,” pages 66–69.

RECESS & LUNCH ROUTINE

Remember to ...

- ✓ Clean work space.
- ✓ Get lunch.
- ✓ Sign out recess equipment.
- ✓ Get coat.
- ✓ Walk quietly in halls.

Sample Recess/Lunch Anchor Chart

END OF THE DAY

By the time the end of the day rolls around, both fifth graders and teachers may be pretty wiped out. This is also a time of day when teachers and students are usually thinking about vastly different things. While teachers are pressing to squeeze as much learning out of the last lesson of the day as possible, students are starting to think about what happens after school. In the rush, teachers may forget to provide students with the time and support they need to have a productive and relaxed end of the day.

As you did for the beginning-of-school tasks, brainstorm a list of end-of-day tasks with your students. Estimate how much time each task will take. Once you've totaled up these times, you'll know how long students need to get ready at the end of the day. Remember to see if some tasks can be moved to other times of the day. Then, teach students the routines they'll need to follow to complete their end-of-day tasks, using interactive modeling. Post anchor charts as reminders, too.

To further ensure that you'll avoid an end-of-day scramble and finish on a positive note, make a closing meeting part of your classroom routine. A closing meeting allows students and teachers to end the day in fun, relaxing, and



Ending the Day with a Closing Circle

A closing meeting (or closing circle) can be a calming and focused way to close the school day. You can have the class gather for a quiet reflection or for a relaxed game. Here are a few other ideas for a closing meeting:

- **Sharing and reflecting.** Students chat with a partner or take turns in an “around-the-circle” share, discussing what they learned or enjoyed about school that day.
- **Playing a game or singing.** Invite students to play a math or spelling game or sing a favorite song.

Learn More about Closing Meetings at

www.responsiveclassroom.org

“Closing Circle,” *Responsive Classroom Newsletter*, February 2011. Also, search on the term “closing circle” for more information.

reflective ways. About ten minutes before dismissal, stop your lesson, gather the children in your meeting spot, and wind down together.

TRANSITIONS

“Okay, everyone. Put away your math work and get ready for recess.” Sounds simple enough, right? Not quite! To transition from math to recess, students need to complete many steps, from putting away their work to lining up to go outside. Transitioning from one subject to the next can involve multiple steps, too.

We may feel pressured to pack as much learning time as we can into every work period, so it’s easy to hurry transitions. But when we do, the classroom climate can feel rushed and chaotic. By creating transitions that allow enough time, structure, and support, we can ensure that these times of the day are calm and reassuring for students while giving them the mental space to actually learn more in the long run.

Use interactive modeling to teach students how to transition well. Here are some of the transition behaviors you’ll want to model and practice with students:

- ❖ Putting work away
- ❖ Getting a drink of water
- ❖ Using the bathroom
- ❖ Moving from meeting area to desks (and vice versa)
- ❖ Lining up

In addition, here are a few other things you can do to set students up for successful transitions:

END-OF-DAY ROUTINE

Remember to ...

- ✓ Pack up homework.
- ✓ Get coat, hat, etc.
- ✓ Do afternoon tasks (clean up, put away supplies).
- ✓ Think about afterschool activities.
- ✓ Gather for closing circle.

Sample End-of-Day Anchor Chart

■ **Visual reminders.** For complicated, multistep transitions, students benefit from having anchor charts listing the essential steps (similar to the ones for the start of the day, page 43; recess and lunch, page 44; and the end of the day, page 46). Create these charts with your class by brainstorming what they need to remember during these times. When they're involved in making the charts, students will be more likely to use them throughout the day.

■ **Verbal reminders.** Quick verbal reminders help keep students on track. Consider how some of the following reminders might set students up for success:

- ❖ "We're heading to PE. Make sure you have your sneakers."
- ❖ "That was a great writing share. We're about to transition to math. What are some things we need to do as we move from writing to math?"
- ❖ "Yesterday, quite a few people forgot to bring their notebook to the circle for our whole-group lesson. Let's all work on remembering that for this afternoon's lesson."
- ❖ "It's time to put away art supplies and get ready for snack. Let's list some things we need to remember to do."

Learn More about Schedules and Routines at

www.responsiveclassroom.org

The First Six Weeks of School by Paula Denton and Roxann Kriete (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2000).

47

■ **Revisit and remodel.** You may find as the year goes on that a particular transition just isn't working. If several students are having a hard time with the same transition, the problem likely lies with the transition, not the students. Have a short class meeting and see what's going on: "I've noticed that the end of the day is often feeling very rushed and that many people are having a hard time staying calm. Let's share some ideas about why that's happening and what we can do to make it better."

ACADEMIC ROUTINES

Up to this point, we've explored various routines that students need to learn so that they can navigate the school day. We need to pay the same kind of

attention to the academic routines of the day. Here are a few key academic routines to model and practice with fifth graders:

- ❖ Sharing a piece of writing with a partner
- ❖ Offering positive feedback to a partner
- ❖ Logging on to school computers
- ❖ Searching for useful Internet sites
- ❖ Using calculators to check work
- ❖ Taking digital photos of work samples for portfolios
- ❖ Reading aloud to book buddies
- ❖ Listening closely during read-alouds



48

With so many academic routines to teach, it can be hard to figure out which ones to teach first. Here's one approach for deciding: As you plan each lesson and activity, take a quick, mental walk through the activity from the perspective of students in the classroom. What will each student need to do as a part of the work you're assigning? What might they already know how to do? What might they struggle with? Keeping a "student's-eye view" of the classroom often points to the academic routines and structures that students will need guidance and support with.

Learn More about Interactive Modeling and Academic Routines at www.responsiveclassroom.org

Learning Through Academic Choice by Paula Denton, EdD (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2005).

EMERGENCIES

Throughout the year, your school will likely practice several emergency drills: fire, bus evacuation, lockdown, and others. It's a good idea to walk through these procedures with your students before the school practices them as a whole. This is especially important for anxious students, who can get very nervous during these kinds of drills. In fact, modeling and practicing just what to do before there are hundreds of other students involved can help calm everyone's nerves. It can also enable fifth graders to serve as appropriate role models for younger students.

What about when there's a classroom emergency, such as a student who has a bloody nose or gets sick? Make sure classroom routines are in place for these times and practice them in advance. For example:

- ❖ If students are working independently, they keep working.
- ❖ If you're in the middle of a lesson or all together in the meeting area, students move to their seats and find something to read.
- ❖ If you need to step out of the classroom, a student whom you've previously designated to act as messenger alerts the next-door teacher.
- ❖ A student who feels sick and needs to see the school nurse fills out a pass (if required) that you sign.

OTHER ROUTINES

Depending on the classroom setup and students' needs, you may also want to use interactive modeling to teach routines for bathroom breaks, daily meetings, and read-alouds, and to teach social skills such as greeting people in respectful, friendly ways. What other routines do your students need to learn? Think about other parts of the day that might be confusing or challenging for students and how you can use interactive modeling to help set them up for success.

49

Closing Thoughts

One of the most exciting aspects of teaching fifth grade is that students are able to handle more (and more challenging) content than in the lower elementary grades. It can be tempting, then, for fifth grade teachers to focus almost exclusively on teaching academic content while hoping fifth graders can figure out most routines by themselves. However, as a colleague of mine likes to say, "Hope is not a classroom management strategy!"

Investing time in setting up effective schedules and in teaching students key routines is still wise. It will pay huge dividends, especially later in the year when fifth graders can become more independent. Students will feel comfortable and safe. They'll feel more confident in taking positive academic risks, and they'll be more likely to do high-quality project work and be more responsible, self-motivated learners.