

Classroom Management in a High School Lab Class

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In a high school science lab class, how do you keep 38 students involved, interested, and on-task? In other words, how do you effectively manage your classroom? Some things I have learned and picked up over the years might be helpful to other teachers who are struggling with this question.

At the very beginning of the new term, I make sure to let the students know that I will expect a lot from them and that I care enough about them to push them farther than they think they can go. I also tell them that my goal is for us all to have fun while learning science. From this initial tone, we go into the social contract.

The first thing I then do when I get a new set of students at the start of a new year or term (on a block schedule) is to set up class rules. Instead of dictating to the kids, I like to make a social contract with them, so that they have a part in making and establishing the rules of each class. We talk about what behaviors are appropriate and necessary for the class to function well and for everyone's safety. We decide as a class what rules are important to us and what the consequences will be for violating our contract. Once we have decided, I type everything up, make a poster out of the rules, and the whole class signs that we will all uphold these rules. Because the students are actively involved in this, they tend to follow the rules more than if I were just telling them the rules.

Another big part of a lab class is, of course, lab work. I keep my students in their lab groups for everything because of the way my room is set up. Labs are typically done in groups of four to five students in my classes. With this many students in a group, I have a set of lab team duties that should rotate for each lab. The facilitator is in charge of making sure other members know what their jobs are, and this person I leads the group on the directions and how-to of the lab. The presenter is in charge of presenting the results for the lab or activity to the class, after consulting with the group and coming to consensus. The recorder is in charge of making sure all the data and lab results are recorded and shared with the group. Finally the materials and clean-up person is in charge of acquiring the lab materials needed, and of cleaning up and returning materials to the proper place after the lab is completed. For groups of five, this last function is split in two—one student acquires the materials and another is in charge of clean-up. This enables all students to participate in the lab, so that no one is left out of the laboratory process.

Another item that really helps keep the class running smoothly is planning. I try to have my entire term planned out before the term starts. I hand this tentative calendar out on the first day of class and post it in the room on a daily and monthly basis. I

also post this calendar on Blackboard, our school web tool for student use, so that students and parents can access the calendar from home. The Blackboard site also has all of my note sets and labs posted, so if a student is absent, s/he can still access the work missed. Part of planning includes not only the calendar of what we are doing, but also clearly states expectations for each activity or assignment. It helps tremendously when the students know exactly what is expected of them and how to do the activity.

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