

## Classroom Management Strategies for Career Technical Education Teachers

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### Abstract

Many skills are needed to be a successful CTE teacher. A simple search of readily available online databases finds that classroom management is one of the most critical skills teachers need. Classroom management involves creating a learning environment that keeps CTE students safe and focused on learning tasks. Thus, the purpose of this paper is multiple-fold: (1) to provide an overview of selected classroom management literature, (2) to offer CTE teachers a menu of strategies for possible use in their respective educational settings, and (3) to share classroom management insights of an educator with extensive CTE teaching and administrative experience in public K-12 schools.

### Introduction

The significance of classroom management cannot be overstated. A search of scholarly databases using the descriptor “classroom management” will yield a plethora of citations. However, a more targeted search of the ERIC database combining the subject descriptors “classroom management” and “career and technical education” did not yield a single citation. This dearth of citations underscores the pressing need for specific classroom management resources tailored to the unique context of CTE. CTE teachers are unique because teaching such subjects includes classroom instruction and hands-on laboratory application, each requiring different management strategies. Selected classroom management-related literature is presented in this paper.

### What is Classroom Management

Hope (2021) described classroom management as a teacher-created environment where students can learn effectively. Emphasizing the importance of classroom management, Cescon (2021) explained that students can be challenging to manage, even on the best days. As such, the teacher must set expectations that balance firmness and fairness for classroom management policies. Cescon (2021) suggested several general strategies for classroom management. Among these general were: (1) set clear expectations, (2) model respect, (3) personal connections, (4) bell ringer activities, (5) no downtime during lab work, and (6) differentiated instruction. Rabadi and

Ray (2017) perhaps stated it best when they noted that “there is no silver bullet” regarding successful classroom management. Adams and Ray (2016) acknowledged that an effective classroom is the most fundamental factor needed to facilitate student learning. There are three critical areas of classroom management: (1) setting clear expectations, (2) building classroom rapport, and (3) time on task.

### **Setting Clear Expectations**

Not surprisingly, several writers have stressed the importance of setting clear expectations (e.g., Cescon, 2021; Hope, 2021; Johnson, 2016; Rabadi & Ray, 2017). Cescon (2021) noted that students needed structure and wanted to know what was expected when entering the classroom. Regarding expectations, Cescon (2021) suggested that teachers consider policies for homework submission, participation, restroom breaks, and technology use. Building on the thoughts of Cescon (2012), Hope (2021) reported that students need to know what is expected of them and why it is expected. Hope (2021) also explained that students must feel safe and connected to the larger classroom community to maximize academic achievement. Similarly, Rabadi and Ray (2017) reported that students need structure and safety to learn. Rabadi and Ray (2017) emphasized that teachers must rely on classroom awareness and instinct to be effective. They further explained that nothing is easy about trying to guide distractable students along the learning journey. Johnson (2016) noted that it is essential to establish a classroom management process where positive student actions are encouraged, and negative student actions are discouraged.

### **Building Classroom Rapport**

Many writers have emphasized the importance of building classroom rapport (e.g., Cescon, 2021; Dustova & Cotton, 2015; Franklin & Harrington, 2019; & Tingley, n.d.). Cescon (2021) stressed the importance of personal connections, as teachers are among the most influential people in student lives for the better. Further support is provided by Johnson (2016), who expressed that relationships are a critical component of successful classroom management. Rabadi and Ray (2017) suggested that successful classroom management hinges on a balance of warmth and firm boundaries. Tingley (n.d.) emphasized that bad student behavior cannot be ignored and that teachers need to model the conduct expected of students. Cescon (2021) reinforced that by modeling respect, students realize that the teacher seeks what is in their best interests. In related thoughts, Dustova and Cotton (2015) stated that setting positive expectations begins with teachers. They went on to explain that building relationships with students is essential to classroom management. Franklin and Harrington (2019) suggested that meaningful teacher-student relationships are the first step in effective classroom management and teaching.

### **Time on Task**

Cescon (2021), Johnson (2016), and Tingley (n.d.) have all proposed strategies for keeping students on task productively and safely. Bell ringers are frequently used to get students focused upon entering the classroom. Cescon (2021) noted that daily bell ringers help engage students quickly as they enter the classroom and set the tone for the day. As Tingley (n.d.) explained, instructional time does not need to be disrupted when students understand and follow classroom processes. Johnson (2016) discussed the importance of lesson planning for creating productive learning classrooms. Lesson plans where students transition from one activity to another and are on task are essential as they stay focused on learning (Johnson, 2016). Cescon (2021) noted that

not all students learn at the same speed and that it is essential to have supplemental activities to avoid instructional downtime. Placing students in small groups progressing at similar speeds results in more time on task and less disruption (Cescon, 2021).

**Menu of Classroom Management Strategies**

Next is a menu of strategies CTE teachers can adapt to their educational settings. These strategies include bell ringer, homework collection, and end-of-lab cleanup and dismissal.

Sample Steps for Beginning a Lecture Classroom Day with a Bell Ringer.

Step	Process	Benefits/Notes
Step 1	Students enter the classroom and take assigned seats.	Students are on an established routine. This established routine provides flexibility while the CTE teacher manages other tasks.
Step 2	Students complete the bell ringer posted on the learning management system.	The bell ringer serves as an anticipatory set for the lesson that day.
Step 3	Students submit bell ringer responses via the learning management system.	Students receive credit for thoughtful bell ringer responses.

Sample Steps for End of Lab Cleanup and Dismissal

Step	Process	Benefits/Notes
Step 1	The lead student designee announces the time to begin lab-based cleanup.	This process simulates the real-world end of a workday.
Step 2	Students begin their assigned cleanup tasks.	This process simulates the real-world end of a workday. Tasks change weekly, so students work through all lab areas multiple times during the school year.
Step 3	The lead student designee confirms that assigned cleanup tasks have been completed.	This process simulates the real-world end of a workday. All learners serve as the lead students multiple times during the school year.
Step 4	Students collect their personal belongings and return to their seats.	This process simulates the real-world end of a workday.
Step 5	The passing bell rings. The teacher dismisses the students.	This process simulates the real-world end of a workday.

Sample Steps for Assignment Collection Upon Classroom Entry

Step	Process	Benefit
Step 1	Make sure your assignment meets all criteria.	Learners review their work before grading, confirming that all assignment criteria have been met before submission.
Step 2	Place your assignment in the homework tray on the teacher's desk.	Assignments are submitted following a consistent process.
Step 3	Take your seat and begin the day's bell ringer.	Learners transition from submitting assignments to taking their seats to the daily bell ringer, which allows the teacher to complete administrative tasks.

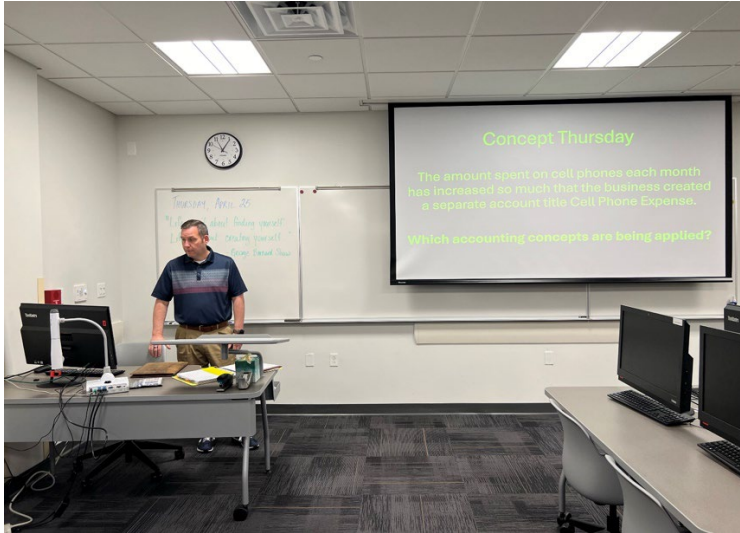
Sample Steps for Assignment Collection via Learning Management System

Step	Process	Benefit
Step 1	Make sure your assignment meets all criteria.	Learners review their work before grading, confirming that all assignment criteria have been met before submission.
Step 2	Upload your assignment using the appropriate learning management system link.	Assignments are submitted following a consistent process.
Step 3	Confirm that the correct file has been submitted to the learning management system.	Learners can confirm via review of the submitted file that the assignment that was intended to be submitted was the one that was uploaded.

**Interview with Eric Green, an educator with extensive teaching and administrative experience in public K-12 schools**

Eric Green is a former Indiana CTE business education teacher. In addition to his experiences as an Indiana CTE business education teacher, Eric has served as a high school principal and corporation assistant superintendent. Eric recently completed his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Ball State University. The interview questions and Eric's responses are noted below.

Figure 1: Eric Green waiting for students to arrive with the day's bell ringer on the screen.



### **What are the most challenging aspects of classroom management in a CTE classroom?**

In my experience, the most challenging aspect of classroom management in a CTE classroom is keeping students engaged and motivated. With so many distractions outside the classroom, holding students' attention and ensuring they are fully invested in the material can be difficult. Additionally, CTE classes often involve hands-on learning and technical skills, which can be more challenging and require more supervision and guidance. Safety is also a significant concern for the CTE classroom, as there are countless opportunities for someone to become injured.

### **In your opinion, what are the leading causes of misbehavior in a CTE classroom?**

There can be a variety of reasons why students might misbehave in a CTE classroom. In some cases, misbehavior is unintentionally caused by the teacher. CTE teachers must be organized with a clear classroom management plan detailing the room/lab/workshop's rules, procedures, and safety protocol. Allow students to know the "why" behind the rules and procedures. Students are more likely to self-regulate when they know where the boundaries are and why. Students will still test those boundaries occasionally; to them, it is a type of "quality check" to ensure that you consistently enforce your classroom expectations. With these consistent boundaries, getting students back on the right track is easier when they know the expectations and that you are inclined to enforce them.

Some potential causes for students' disengagement or uninterest in the material being taught are struggling with the content, being overwhelmed by the workload, and personal or emotional issues impacting their behavior. It is crucial to approach each situation with empathy and understanding while consistently enforcing expectations for appropriate behavior.

### **How do you deal with disruptive and challenging behaviors?**

Dealing with disruptive and challenging behaviors can be difficult, but remaining calm and maintaining a positive attitude is essential. Your response to the disruption can determine the situation's outcome in either a positive or negative way. One effective strategy is to address the behavior directly and quickly, using clear and concise language. It is also essential to listen to the student's perspective and try to understand the underlying reasons for their behavior. Use the situation as a teaching moment. Ask students questions that require them to reflect on their

behavior, such as, “What is the proper procedure for our class?” “What are the safety guidelines for \_\_\_ (preparing to weld, using the safety guard on the table saw, etc.)? If necessary, you may need to implement consequences or involve a school counselor or administrator. Always prioritize the safety and well-being of all students involved and seek support and guidance if required. Never feel like you must tackle all student discipline issues alone; sometimes, outside support is the only way to resolve the issue.

Figure 2: Eric Green completing administrative tasks while students engage with the bell ringer.



### **Do you think there is a specific way of avoiding student misbehavior?**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to avoiding student misbehavior. A successful CTE teacher can reduce these disruptions by clearly defining classroom rules and safety procedures. The CTE teacher should then consistently enforce those rules and procedures in a non-threatening way.

CTE teachers have a unique opportunity to engage students in a way impossible in other subject areas. A significant component of student misbehavior is related to student engagement. The hands-on nature of CTE allows teachers to create an opportunity for students to be highly engaged. High engagement typically results in fewer discipline issues. The more responsibilities you can give students, the more invested they will become. Rotating safety officers and assigned workshop maintenance or cleaning duties are activities that increase engagement through increased student responsibility.

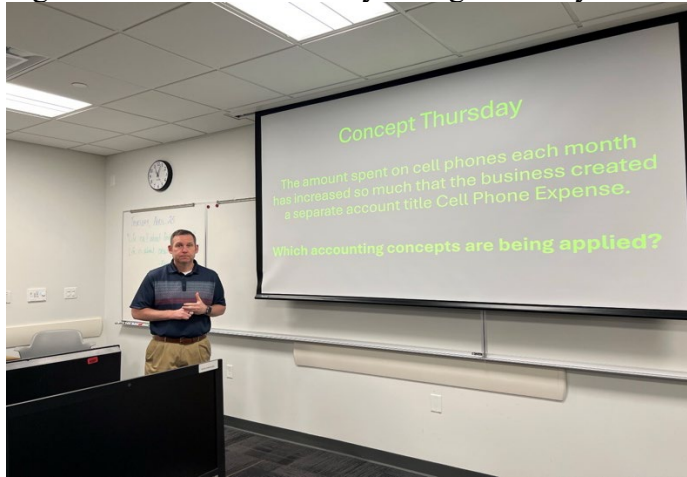
Developing authentic relationships with your students is another effective strategy to prevent or address misbehavior. Students thrive in an environment with approval, appreciation, positive reinforcement, and high expectations. Modeling that mistakes are a learning opportunity and that everyone can be successful can create an environment with fewer disruptive behaviors.

### **What management strategies do not work well in a CTE classroom?**

In a CTE classroom, specific management strategies may not work well. For example, being too strict or authoritarian can create a hostile learning environment and cause students to disengage or even rebel. This typically happens when a teacher corrects or punishes a student in front of the class. Corrective action should always take place privately. In addition, group punishments are rarely effective. For example, deciding to keep all students from working on a significant project

in the automotive shop because of a small number of students' misbehavior will erode student motivation and engagement. Similarly, being too lenient or permissive can lead to chaos and a lack of respect for rules and boundaries (as well as be dangerous). It is essential for CTE teachers to find a balance between being firm and supportive and to adapt their management style to the needs and personalities of their students. Students will usually meet your expectations, so set them high from the beginning.

Figure 2: Eric Green is ready to begin the day's lesson after completing administrative tasks.



### **In terms of classroom management, what do administrators expect of CTE teachers?**

Administrators expect CTE teachers to maintain a positive and safe learning environment for their students. This is usually the number one priority in an administrator's eyes. CTE teachers should also establish clear expectations for behavior and enforce them consistently (This is critically important). When the support of an administrator is needed, strong CTE teachers will attempt several methods to resolve the issue before escalating the situation to the administrative level. One of the most critical steps to take is to have consistent contact with the parents or guardians of your students. Administrators are always there for support but usually are more receptive when the CTE teacher has documented that they have done their part to correct inappropriate behavior.

### **Summary**

Many skills are needed to be a successful CTE teacher. One such skill is classroom management. Classroom management involves creating a learning environment that keeps CTE students safe and on learning tasks. Thus, the purpose of this paper is multiple-fold: (1) to provide an overview of selected classroom management topics, (2) to offer CTE teachers a menu of strategies for possible use in their respective educational settings, and (3) to share classroom management insights of an educator with extensive CTE teaching and administrative experience in public K-12 schools.

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