

## Structuring Classroom Experiences for Success

### *Proactive Management Strategies*

## Planning for smooth-sailing transitions

### ***Understanding the problem***

Typically, students' behaviors are "crazy making" (more disruptive and frustrating) to teachers during times that involve transitions. We refer to these challenging times as "hot spots." "Hot spots" occur due to a lack of structure during times of transition. To avoid these "hot spots" and prevent chaos during these less structured periods, teachers need to systematically determine how students should engage in the change process. Transitioning students, without a plan, within or between activities is similar to baking a cake without a recipe. The risk of baking a cake without following the procedures (a recipe) is that it may result in disaster (e.g., a poorly assembled, inedible product). But, following the procedures increases the likelihood that a delicious and aromatic culinary delight will emerge from the oven. The same applies to daily plans or procedures for managing transitions. Without them, students' behavior may disintegrate with them students' behavior may flourish.

### ***A key to the solution***

Planning for smooth-sailing transitions is a proactive strategy that can significantly impact student behavior.

Transitions occur throughout the instructional day in a variety of forms. "Between" transitions occur after specified increments of time or activities. For example, students change subjects or content areas (reading & math) or they change instructional periods (period 1 and period 2).

In contrast, "within" transitions occur in the midst of an activity and they may occur more than once within a lesson or structured activity. For example, during history class students may be required to complete a **graphic organizer** to stimulate prior knowledge in the introduction, engage in a **cooperative learning** activity during the lesson to practice newly acquired skills or content, and participate in a **Think Pair Share** activity to review the lesson's big idea. This would require students to "change gears" three times during the same subject.

## Management Tips

**Step 1** Identify the “hot spots” (transition times) that typically occur during the day both between and within instructional activities. Review what you expect students to do when they “change gears” during these times. Again, consider what you want students to do instead of what you do not (i.e., the incompatible behaviors of the “crazing making” ones) to hurdle these “hot spots.” Questioning is a tool that can be employed to facilitate this process.

For example during a “between periods” transition, if students were returning from lunch, what should they be doing? The answer may be, *entering the classroom on time (e.g., prior to the tardy bell) and quietly gathering their materials in their assigned seats.*

Similarly, during a “within period” transition, if the students were changing from note-taking to a cooperative learning project, what should they be doing? The answer may be, *quickly gathering their materials, moving desks to create a circle with their assigned group members, talking only about the project, and beginning project-related tasks immediately.*

**Step 2** Make a list of your expectations for student behavior during “hot spots”. Use this list to generate transition plans or procedures. Remember, as described in the **Communicating Expectations section**, it is important to limit the procedures to three to five clearly stated expectations for “changing gears.”

**Step 3** Identify the methods for repeatedly communicating these important transition procedures to students. Clearly communicating expectations, prior to and during transitions, is necessary to hurdle the “hot spots”. To maximize effectiveness, procedures must be reviewed prior to transitions

<b>S = Silently groove</b>
<b>W = With it</b>
<b>I = Into</b>
<b>N = Next</b>
<b>G = Gear</b>

between activities and at the beginning of each activity within lessons. For example, “within” transition plans may involve a mnemonic a device to structure and facilitate students

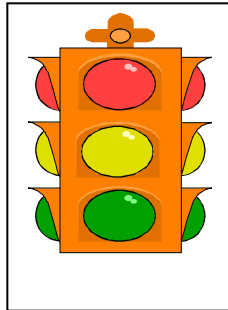
<b>S = Smoothly</b>
<b>H = Hustle</b>
<b>I = It</b>
<b>F = Forward</b>
<b>T = Together</b>

movement during the social studies lesson from the completion of the stimulating **graphic organizer**, to active participation in the hands-on **cooperative learning** activity, and finally into the summarizing Think Pair Share exercise. SWING & SHIFT are examples of keyword mnemonics that could be used.

**Step 4** You also need to consider how students will be visually and/or auditorily reminded of these expectations, on a regularly scheduled basis, before the transitions occur. This is an important consideration for students who experience visual and/or auditory processing difficulties. For younger students a traffic signal or soft wind chimes may be appropriate.

When the teacher changes the color of the light, or rings the chimes the students understand that a change of activities is expected and proceed accordingly.

Grades 4 &5:



**Green = GO**

High to moderate sound and action are OK

**Yellow = SLOW DOWN**

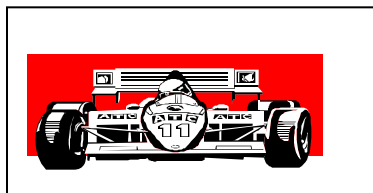
Minimal sound and action are OK.

**Red = STOP!**

No sound and no action allowed!

For older students, the teacher may modify the traffic light prompt and use different types of cars to illustrate expectations for transitions. Other examples include a gear shift knob mounted on a board, a beeper system, or a daily schedule planner that is visually displayed on a white board.

For Older Students:



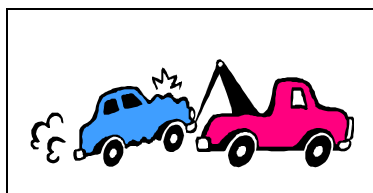
**Nascar Mode = Full on!**

High to moderate sound and action are OK.



**Limo Mode = Sleek and steady!**

Minimal sound and action are OK.



**Tow Mode = Chill out!**

No sound and no action allowed!

**Step 5** Look for students who are following the appropriate transition procedures and acknowledge their success verbally or nonverbally. For older students nonverbal signals (e.g., thumbs up) may be more effective. With younger students, verbal praise is usually more appropriate.

### **Jazzing It Up**

1. Involve students in generating ideas for appropriate behaviors (e.g., expectations) during “hot spots.” Conduct an exercise in which they identify “crazy-making” and “incompatible” behaviors.

Stimulate their thinking by asking them to brainstorm what needs to happen during transition times so that they will occur more smoothly. Implement the natural rewards and consequences developed in the **Using Social and Other Natural Rewards** section to provide feedback to students so that they know whether they are meeting or failing to meet the expected transition-related behaviors. Have students design the creative and colorful displays of transition procedures using graphics. This helps students to experience a sense of ownership and investment which in turn maximizes their success.

2. Transition procedures should include no more than three to five expected behaviors per plan. They should be positively stated with visual cues should correspond to the print.
3. As was the case in the **Communicating Expectations** section, ask yourself if your expectations pass the “RRA” test. In other words, are they Reasonable, Realistic, and Age-appropriate? Again, talking with colleagues can be helpful in creating and maintaining a balanced perspective regarding your teacher expectations for student behavior during “hot spots.”

For example, is it a realistic expectation for adolescents (being the social animals that they are genetically predisposed to be) to enter the classroom quietly – without socializing? Probably not!

Next, ask yourself what you are willing to tolerate and how much. Some levels of socializing are more acceptable than others at certain times. For example, if you find some level of student socializing acceptable upon entering the classroom after lunch, then meet them at the door and hand them a key with LIMO written on it. This is used to cue students that the key to success is to shift into in the “Limo Mode” and be sleek and steady (minimal sound or action are expected).

On the other hand, if you do not want students to socialize when they enter the classroom after lunch, then meet them at the door and hand them a key with TOW written on it. This is used to cue students that the key to success is shift

into in the “Tow Mode” and chill out (no sound or action are expected). In both cases, it is important to look for and acknowledge students who are engaging in the expected transition procedures by providing age-appropriate feedback.

4. Be prepared to be consistent and maintain a sense of humor! Remember to be cautious of the “once and done” trap. The key to success is consistent and continual revisiting of the behavioral expectations during between and within times of transition. In doing so, the positive classroom climate is enhanced – allowing teachers and students to hurdle the “hotspots!”

### ***What’s Next?***

Planning for smooth-sailing transitions is one of several proactive approaches to making the positive or desired student behavior(s) happen. Additional strategies include

- Communicating clear expectations
- Engaging students actively
- Using social and other natural rewards
- Using classwide management systems
- Making decisions based on a least-to-most intrusive rule

Management Tool Box

Management Basics