



The InTA Signature Planning Tool

Proactive classroom management
8 prompt cards to prevent disruption before it starts

Professional reflection cards for teachers

Why proactive classroom management matters

Classroom management is often associated with the question:

How do I react when disruption happens?

In practice, teachers frequently have to intervene, remind rules, or correct behaviour in order to keep the lesson going. However, reacting repeatedly can create tension, slow down the work, and make the atmosphere less stable.

Research in classroom management has shown that reacting to disruption is often less effective than preventing it.

In their classic observations, Jacob Kounin and Paul Gump described what they called the **ripple effect**: when a teacher reacts strongly to one student's behaviour, the behaviour may stop in that student, but other students may begin to disengage or misbehave.

These observations highlight an important point:

classroom management does not depend only on the reaction to a problem, but also on the conditions in which the problem appears.

Many behaviour difficulties occur when the framework of the lesson is not sufficiently clear or stable.

For example, when:

- expectations are not recalled at the right moment
- transitions are not structured
- the environment makes attention difficult
- the relationship becomes tense
- the rules are applied inconsistently

In these situations, the difficulty does not come only from the student.

The organisation of the lesson may not provide enough reference points for the group to regulate itself.

Proactive classroom management means working on this framework.

It involves:

- creating predictable routines
- giving clear instructions
- maintaining a stable relationship with students
- organising the environment to support attention
- guiding behaviour early instead of reacting late

This approach does not lower expectations.

It makes the conditions of the lesson clearer, so that students can remain engaged without constant correction.

The following prompt cards focus on this preventive approach.

Each card examines one aspect of classroom organisation that can influence behaviour, even when the difficulty seems to come only from the student.

They can be used for:

- lesson preparation
- professional reflection
- mentoring discussions
- training sessions
- or review after a difficult lesson.

The goal is not to eliminate all disruption, but to create conditions where the lesson can remain stable, with fewer tensions and fewer repeated interventions.

1 Prompt card - Connect before correcting

Principle

The way a lesson begins often influences how students behave during the rest of the session.

When the first interaction is calm and respectful, the group is more likely to enter the activity without resistance.

Why it matters

When the first interaction of the lesson is a correction, students may become defensive.

A brief moment of connection helps create a cooperative climate and makes later guidance easier to accept.

Connecting does not mean being permissive.

It means creating the conditions that make authority effective.

Situation

At the start of the lesson, several students enter noisily and continue talking after sitting down.

Reactive response

The teacher immediately says:

"Be quiet. Sit down. Take out your notebook."

Some students comply, but others continue talking, and the atmosphere becomes tense.

Adjustment tested

The teacher greets students at the door:

"Good morning."

"Take your notebook when you come in."

"Nice to see you today."

Instructions are given once everyone is seated.

Observed result

Students settle more quickly, fewer reminders are needed, and the lesson starts calmly.

The expectations have not changed.

The climate has become more stable.

Establishing contact at the beginning of the lesson does not reduce expectations.

It makes it easier to guide behaviour afterwards, because the interaction starts from a relationship rather than from correction.

2 Prompt card - Maintain and repair the relationship

Principle

Classroom management depends not only on rules, but also on the stability of the relationship over time.

When the relationship remains secure, the teacher can guide behaviour without needing to increase pressure.

Why it matters

Conflicts and tensions are inevitable.

If they are not addressed, they can accumulate and later appear as resistance, disengagement, or oppositional behaviour.

Students accept correction more easily when they feel respected and treated fairly.

Situation

A student refuses to start the task and answers the teacher abruptly.

Reactive response

The teacher insists in front of the class:

"You need to work now. Stop arguing."

The student becomes more oppositional and the tension spreads.

Adjustment tested

The teacher gives the instruction to the class, then speaks quietly to the student:

"I need you to start the work."

"If something is not going well today, we will talk after the exercise."

After the lesson, the teacher takes a moment to clarify the situation.

Observed result

The student participates more during the following lessons and fewer confrontations occur.

The rule has not changed.

The relationship has been stabilised.

Maintaining and repairing the relationship does not weaken authority.

On the contrary, when the relationship is stable, corrections are accepted more easily and conflicts are less likely to escalate.

3 Prompt card - Give reminders before behaviour breaks down

Principle

Behaviour often becomes unstable during moments when the structure of the activity is not fully clear.

Students regulate themselves more easily when they know what is expected before the difficulty appears.

Why it matters

Transitions, waiting time, and complex instructions are moments where behaviour can deteriorate quickly.

If the teacher intervenes only after disruption begins, correction becomes more difficult.

Short reminders help students stay within the framework of the activity.

Situation

During group work, several students start talking about unrelated topics.

Reactive response

The teacher says:

"Stop talking and work."

The class becomes quiet for a moment, then the noise returns.

Adjustment tested

Before starting, the teacher says:

"You work in pairs.

Voices low.

If you finish, continue with question 3."

Instructions are written on the board.

Observed result

Students stay on task longer and fewer corrections are needed.

The activity has not changed.

The structure has become clearer.

Reminding expectations before an activity does not mean repeating instructions unnecessarily.

It helps students anticipate what is required and often prevents the need for repeated corrections later.

Prompt card - Use the environment to support behaviour

Principle

Behaviour is influenced not only by rules, but also by the way the classroom is organised. The arrangement of the space, the seating, and the structure of the activity can make attention easier or more difficult to maintain.

Why it matters

Seating, noise, visibility, and movement affect attention and self-control. When the environment creates distraction, the teacher must intervene more often. A structured environment makes behaviour easier to regulate for the whole group.

Situation

Students choose their seats freely and spend time talking to friends.

Reactive response

The teacher repeatedly asks for silence and moves students during the lesson.

Adjustment tested

Seats are assigned for certain activities, while choice is allowed at other times with clear rules.

Students know that if work is not done, the seat will change.

Observed result

Less talking, faster start of work, fewer interruptions.

The freedom has not disappeared.
The framework has become more predictable.

Organising the classroom environment does not replace authority.

It makes behaviour easier to regulate because the situation itself becomes clearer and more predictable for students.

Prompt card - Reinforce the behaviour you want to see

Principle

In a classroom, the teacher's attention becomes a reference for the group. What is noticed and named tends to guide the behaviour of the students.

Why it matters

If the teacher mostly reacts to negative behaviour, negative behaviour becomes the focus of the lesson. Naming the expected behaviour helps students understand what is required. Positive feedback clarifies expectations and stabilises the group.

Situation

Students take a long time to settle after instructions.

Reactive response

"Stop talking. Hurry up."

Some students stop, others continue.

Adjustment tested

The teacher says:

"Thank you to the students who are ready."

"I see several notebooks open."

"Good, we can start."

Observed result

More students prepare quickly and the class settles faster.

The demand has not changed.

The focus has changed.

Focusing attention on the behaviour that is expected does not mean ignoring problems.

It helps students understand what to do, which often reduces the need to intervene repeatedly on what should not happen.

Prompt card - Make expectations explicit

Principle

Students rely on the framework of the lesson to know how to behave.

When the rules or routines are not clearly defined, behaviour becomes less predictable.

Why it matters

Rules that are only imposed are often tested.

Rules that are explained and repeated become part of the routine.

Clear expectations reduce uncertainty and conflict.

Situation

Students interrupt each other during discussions.

Reactive response

"Stop interrupting."

The behaviour continues.

Adjustment tested

The teacher explains the rule:

"One person speaks at a time.

Raise your hand.

We do this so everyone can be heard."

The rule is repeated before discussions.

Observed result

Fewer interruptions and calmer exchanges.

The rule has not become stricter.

It has become clearer.

Explaining expectations does not make the rule weaker.

It makes the framework more understandable, which often makes behaviour easier to guide and reduces repeated conflicts.

7 Prompt card - Stay present in the room

Principle

The teacher's presence plays an important role in maintaining the stability of the group.

When the teacher stays actively connected to what students are doing, attention is easier to maintain.

Why it matters

When the teacher stays at the desk for long periods, students disengage more easily.

Movement, eye contact, and proximity help maintain attention.

Presence allows the teacher to guide the activity before behaviour deteriorates.

Situation

During independent work, several students stop working and start talking.

Reactive response

The teacher calls from the desk:

"Work please."

Noise stops briefly, then returns.

Adjustment tested

The teacher walks around the room, looks at work, and asks short questions.

"What is your next step?"

"Show me what you have done."

Observed result

Students stay engaged longer and fewer reminders are needed.

The task has not changed.

The teacher's presence has changed.

Active presence in the classroom is not a form of control.

It allows the teacher to guide the work more closely, which often keeps students engaged and reduces the need for disciplinary intervention.

Prompt card - Be consistent and fair

Principle

Students need a predictable framework in order to regulate their behaviour.

When the rules change depending on the situation, the group may become uncertain about what is expected.

Why it matters

Students quickly notice when rules are applied differently.

Perceived unfairness increases resistance and conflict.

Consistency makes behaviour easier to regulate for everyone.

Situation

One student is corrected for talking while others are not.

Reactive response

The student protests:

"Why only me?"

Tension increases.

Adjustment tested

The teacher states the rule clearly:

"When someone speaks without permission, I remind the rule.

This applies to everyone."

The same response is used each time.

Observed result

Fewer arguments and more acceptance of correction.

The rule has not become stricter.

It has become more consistent.

Applying rules consistently does not make the classroom more rigid.

It makes the framework more predictable, which helps students understand what is expected and makes authority easier to accept.

Summary — Proactive management reduces the need for discipline

Disruption often increases when the teacher has to react repeatedly during the lesson.

In many situations, the difficulty is not only the student's behaviour, but the conditions in which the behaviour appears.

When the framework of the lesson is unclear, unstable, or unpredictable, students have fewer reference points to regulate their actions.

The teacher then has to intervene more often, which can increase tension instead of reducing it.

Proactive classroom management means paying attention to this framework:

- connecting with students before correcting
- recalling expectations before difficulties appear
- organising the environment to support attention

- reinforcing the behaviour that is expected
- making rules clear and understandable
- staying actively present during the work
- applying rules consistently
- maintaining a stable relationship over time

When the framework is more stable, reactions become simpler, shorter, and less frequent.

Preventing disruption does not remove authority.

It makes authority easier to apply and easier to accept, because students know what is expected and what will happen.

In many cases, small changes in the organisation of the lesson reduce the need for repeated correction.

InTA ANCHOR — stabilising the framework before behaviour escalates

In difficult classroom situations, the first reaction is often to correct, insist, or increase control.

These reactions may work in the moment, but they do not always stabilise the situation over time.

When the teacher has to intervene repeatedly, the lesson can become centred on behaviour instead of learning.

Research on classroom management shows that lasting improvement often comes from examining the framework in which the lesson takes place.

For example:

- Are expectations clear at the moment they are needed?
- Is the activity structured enough for all students to remain engaged?
- Does the classroom environment support attention?
- Is the relationship stable enough to allow correction without conflict?
- Are the rules applied in a predictable and consistent way?

When these elements are more stable, behaviour often becomes easier to regulate without increasing pressure.

At InTA, we encourage teachers to look at classroom situations from this perspective.

Instead of asking only how to react to disruption, it is often useful to examine how the lesson is organised, and how the framework can be made clearer and more predictable.

Teachers do not need perfect control.

They need stable reference points, coherent routines, and the possibility to reflect on practice without oversimplifying the complexity of real classrooms.

This is why InTA resources focus on anticipation, structure, and professional consistency, rather than on quick solutions or isolated techniques.

 If you would like to share your experience, reflect on classroom situations, and exchange with other teachers about classroom management and professional practice, the InTA community and its discussion groups offer a professional space where these questions can be examined collectively and with perspective.

<https://www.innovating-teachers-academy.com/community>

