

Teacher Talk

What is your classroom management profile?

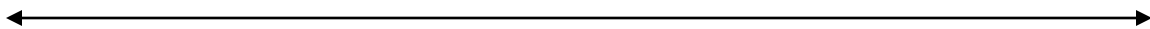


Answer these 12 questions and learn more about your classroom management profile. The steps are simple:

- Read each statement carefully.
- Write your response, from the scale below, on a sheet of paper.
- Respond to each statement based upon either actual or imagined classroom experience.
- Then, follow the scoring instructions below. It couldn't be easier!

1. = Strongly Disagree	2. = Disagree	3. = Neutral	4. = Agree	5. = Strongly Agree
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- (1) If a student is disruptive during class, I assign him/her to detention, without further discussion.
- (2) I don't want to impose any rules on my students.
- (3) The classroom must be quiet in order for students to learn.
- (4) I am concerned about both what my students learn and how they learn.
- (5) If a student turns in a late homework assignment, it is not my problem.
- (6) I don't want to reprimand a student because it might hurt his/her feelings.
- (7) Class preparation isn't worth the effort.
- (8) I always try to explain the reasons behind my rules and decisions.
- (9) I will not accept excuses from a student who is tardy.
- (10) The emotional well-being of my students is more important than classroom control.
- (11) My students understand that they can interrupt my lecture if they have a relevant question.
- (12) If a student requests a hall pass, I always honor the request.

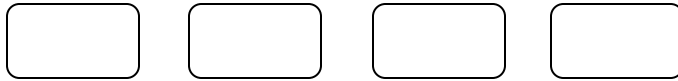


Results

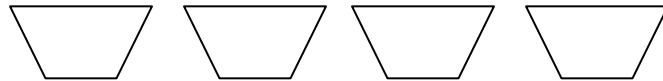
The authoritarian style – statements



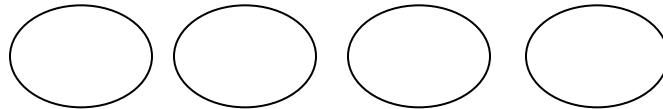
The interactive style – statements
aka authoritative style



The laissez-faire style – statements



The indifferent style – statements



The result is your classroom management profile. Your score for each management style can range from 3 to 15. A high score indicates a strong preference for that particular style. After you have scored your quiz, and determined your profile, read the descriptions of each management style. You may see a little bit of yourself in each one.

As you gain teaching experience, you may find that your preferred style(s) will change. Over time, your profile may become more diverse or more focused. Also, it may be suitable to rely upon a specific style when addressing a particular situation or subject. Perhaps the successful teacher is one who can evaluate a situation and then apply the appropriate style. Finally, remember that the intent of this exercise is to inform you and arouse your curiosity regarding classroom management styles.¹

¹ The classroom management styles are adaptations of the parenting styles discussed in Adolescence, by John T. Santrock.

- Authoritarian

The authoritarian teacher places firm limits and controls on the students. Students will often have assigned seats for the entire term. The desks are usually in straight rows and there are no deviations. Students must be in their seats at the beginning of class and they frequently remain there throughout the period. This teacher rarely gives hall passes or recognizes excused absences.



Often, it is quiet. Students know they should not interrupt the teacher. Since verbal exchange and discussion are discouraged, the authoritarian's students do not have the opportunity to learn and/or practice communication skills.

This teacher prefers vigorous discipline and expects swift obedience. Failure to obey the teacher usually results in detention or a trip to the principal's office. In this classroom, students need to follow directions and not ask why.

At the extreme, the authoritarian teacher gives no indication that he/she cares for the students. Mr. Doe is a good example of an authoritarian teacher. His students receive praise and encouragement infrequently, if at all. Also, he makes no effort to organize activities such as field trips. He feels that these special events only distract the students from learning. After all, Mr. Doe believes that students need only listen to his lecture to gain the necessary knowledge.

Students in this class are likely to be reluctant to initiate activity, since they may feel powerless. Mr. Doe tells the students what to do and when to do it. He makes all classroom decisions. Therefore, his style does little to increase achievement motivation or encourage the setting of personal goals.

One Middle-school pupil reacts to this teaching style:

I don't really care for this teacher. He is really strict and doesn't seem to want to give his students a fair chance. He seems unfair, although that's just his way of getting his point across.

- Authoritative (aka interactive)

The authoritative teacher places limits and controls on the students but simultaneously encourages independence. This teacher often explains the reasons behind the rules and decisions. If a student is disruptive, the teacher offers a polite, but firm, reprimand. This teacher sometimes metes out discipline, but only after careful consideration of the circumstances.



The authoritative teacher is also open to considerable verbal interaction, including critical debates. The students know that they can interrupt the teacher if they have a relevant question or comment. This environment offers the students the opportunity to learn and practice communication skills.

Ms. Smith exemplifies the authoritative teaching style. She exhibits a warm and nurturing attitude toward the students and expresses genuine interest and affection. Her classroom abounds with praise and encouragement. She often writes comments on homework and offers positive remarks to students.

This authoritative teacher encourages self-reliant and socially competent behavior and fosters higher achievement motivation. Often, she will guide the students through a project, rather than lead them.

A student reacts to this style:

I like this teacher. She is fair and understands that students can't be perfect. She is the kind of teacher you can talk to without being put down or feeling embarrassed.

- Laissez-faire

The laissez-faire teacher places few demand or controls on the students. "Do your own thing" describes this classroom. This teacher accepts the student's impulses and actions and is less likely to monitor their behavior.



Mr. Jones uses a laissez-faire style. He strives to not hurt the student's feelings and has difficulty saying no to a student or enforcing rules. If a student disrupts the class, Mr. Jones may assume that he is not giving that student enough attention. When a student interrupts a lecture, Mr. Jones accepts the interruption with the belief that the student must surely have something valuable to add. When he does offer discipline, it is likely to be inconsistent.

Mr. Jones is very involved with his students and cares for them very much. He is more concerned with the students' emotional well-being than he is with classroom control. He sometimes bases classroom decisions on his students' feelings rather than on their academic concerns.

Mr. Jones wants to be the students' friend. He may even encourage contact outside the classroom. He has a difficult time establishing boundaries between his professional life and his personal life.

However, this overindulgent style is associated with students' lack of social competence and self-control. It is difficult for students to learn socially acceptable behavior when the teacher is so permissive. With few demands placed upon them, these students frequently have lower motivation to achieve.

Regardless, students often like this teacher.

A Middle School student says:

This is a pretty popular teacher. You don't have to be serious throughout the class. But sometimes things get out of control and we learn nothing at all.

- Indifferent

The indifferent teacher is not very involved in the classroom. This teacher places few demands, if any, on the students and appears generally uninterested. The indifferent teacher just doesn't want to impose on the students. As such, he/she often feels that class preparation is not worth the effort. Things like field trips and special projects are out of the question. This teacher simply won't take the necessary preparation time. Sometimes, he/she will use the same materials, year after year.



Also, classroom discipline is lacking. This teacher may lack the skills, confidence, or courage to discipline students.

The students sense and reflect the teacher's indifferent attitude. Accordingly, very little learning occurs. Everyone is just "going through the motions" and killing time. In this aloof environment, the students have very few opportunities to observe or practice communication skills. With few demands placed on them and very little discipline, students have low achievement motivation and lack self-control.

According to one student:

This teacher can't control the class and we never learn anything in there. There is hardly ever homework and people rarely bring their books.

Mrs. Johnson is a good example of an indifferent teacher. She uses the same lesson plans every year, never bothering to update them. For her, each day is the same. She lectures for the first twenty minutes of class. Sometimes she will show a film or a slide show. When she does, it becomes a substitute for her lecture, not a supplement.

If there is any time left (and there always is) she allows students to study quietly and to talk softly. As long as they don't bother her, she doesn't mind what they do. As far as she is concerned, the students are responsible for their own education.

Answer Key (based upon Indiana Univ. perspectives)

To score your quiz, add your responses to statements 1, 3, and 9. This is your score for the authoritarian style.²

Statements 4, 8 and 11 refer to the authoritative/ interactive style.

Statements 6, 10, and 12 refer to the laissez-faire style.

Statements 2, 5, and 7 refer to the indifferent style.

² <http://www.cbv.ns.ca/sstudies/gen3.html>

Classroom Organization: The Physical Environment³

Warm, well-run classrooms begin with the room's physical layout — the arrangement of desks and working space, the attractiveness and appeal of bulletin boards, the storage of materials and supplies.

Arranging Space

The physical layout reflects your teaching style. If you want students to collaborate in small groups, for example, organize them around tables or clusters of desks. For frequent whole-group discussions, try a circle or U-shaped desk configuration. If you plan on an individualized, self-paced curriculum, you might set up learning stations.

The physical layout should also reflect you. Don't hesitate to give the room your personal touch with plants, art, rugs, posters, and maybe some cozy pillows for the reading corner.

"Creating a caring, child-centered environment takes lots of thought and planning," says fifth-grade teacher Frank Garcia. "Basic bulletin boards are not enough. I believe in a very colorful classroom with posters, *functional* bulletin boards, and other 'interesting' items to enhance the environment, such as a small refrigerator, TV, and a stereo system with a CD player."

In Reggio Emilia, a northern Italian town whose early childhood programs are internationally acclaimed, classrooms feature displays of children's work, collections of "found" objects, ample space for supplies (all aesthetically arranged), and clearly designated spaces for large- and small-group activities. Reggio Emilia educators stress the need for a classroom environment that informs and engages the child. They consider the physical environment to be "another teacher." And in the sense that it can motivate children, enhance learning, and reduce behavior problems, environment really is an extra teacher.

Author and educator Mike Hopkins points out that personal teaching style and specific educational needs should largely determine how you design your classroom space. Hopkins urges teachers to forget about the way things have always been done and to visit museums, libraries, other schools, and colleagues' classrooms to identify different ways of organizing learning space.

Many teachers prefer to create different areas within the classroom. For example, a classroom might feature a quiet reading corner, a music area where students can play soft music while completing work, a discussion/conversation center, a large table for cooperative projects, spaces for wet or messy projects, multimedia spaces, learning centers or stations, and individual work areas.

Easily accessible materials and supplies can eliminate delays, disruptions, and confusion as students prepare for activities. In poorly arranged classrooms, students spend a lot of time waiting — waiting in line, waiting for help, waiting to begin. To eliminate some waiting, store frequently used items such as scissors and paste in several different areas.

³ <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4134>

Desk Placement

In many classrooms, the largest amount of space is devoted to the arrangement of individual student desks. Teachers vary greatly on their preferred arrangements, but most agree that the days of 30 desks lined in neat rows and facing the teacher's desk up front are long gone. Instead, some teachers like to arrange desks in cooperative groups of four, while many others prefer a U-shaped configuration, where everyone has a front row seat.

"Arrange the room so that you can make eye contact with every student and reach each student with ease," suggests sixth-grade teacher Jane Baird.

But no matter how you arrange desks, don't be afraid to make changes.

"Set your room up, and at the end of each unit or each month, evaluate and make changes," advises fifth grade teacher Laurie Borger. "Move the students' desks on a regular basis so *all* children learn to cooperate with *all* children."

Second-grade teacher Pamela Shannon agrees: "Don't be afraid to make seat and desk changes if the arrangement doesn't work. *You* are in charge."

Environmental Preferences

Other important environmental features include **temperature, lighting, and noise level**. These factors affect students in different ways and are directly related to individual learning styles. Studies suggest that when teachers adjust the environment to students' preferences, the students perform better academically and are better behaved.

How can you address environmental preferences in the classroom? Here are some tips from research and practice:

- **Create both well-lit and dimly-lit areas in the classroom** by using bookcases, screens, plants, and other furniture. Some children learn best in bright light, but others do significantly better in low light. Bright light actually makes some students restless and hyperactive. Try allowing students to sit where they feel most comfortable, or try placing fidgety children in low-light areas and listless children in brighter areas.
- **Provide opportunities for children to move around** while visiting learning centers and other special classroom areas. Most of us have the mistaken impression that children learn best when sitting still, but research now proves that many children need extensive mobility while learning. These children learn significantly more if they move from one area to another as they acquire new information.
- **Establish informal furniture arrangements** where students can sit on soft chairs or pillows, or lounge on the carpet. Another myth is that children learn best when sitting up straight in hard chairs. About 75 percent of the total body weight is supported on only four square inches of bone when humans sit up straight in a hard chair, so it is easy to understand how the resulting stress on the buttock tissues causes fatigue, discomfort, and the need for frequent changes in posture. Research supports the common-sense notion that many students pay better attention and achieve higher grades in more comfortable settings.

- **Establish listening stations** with headsets for children who need sound, **and quiet study areas** for those who work best in silence. Many children disprove another commonly held conception: that silence helps kids concentrate better.
- **Help students become aware of their own temperature preferences** and encourage them to dress accordingly. Temperature preferences vary dramatically, and most children can't concentrate when they are either too cool or too warm.

Designing Classroom Space

The sky's the limit when it comes to designing classroom space. Beverly Kirk, from Carson City Nevada, had her husband make a special desk with a recessed top to keep math manipulatives in one place. Marilyn Aldrich, from Westhampton Beach, New York, uses flat pizza boxes, stacked for storage, to house math manipulatives and other materials. And Jack George, who teaches fourth grades in Rome, New York, built an eight-foot high loft (it can hold six children) in his classroom that functions as a puppet theatre, quiet reading/writing space, teaching platform, private conference center, test make-up area, and place to stage skits, science experiments, and more.