

Teaching Transitions for Elementary Classrooms

Lesson Outline: Introduction: Teacher tells students we are going to learn how to move from desks to carpet and back again properly. We are going to use a song to tell us how long we have to do it. And we are going to use the song "Everything is Awesome" from the Lego movie, which has been cut down to be just 28 seconds long. When the song comes on it means move to the carpet, and get seated crisscross with hands in lap and mouth closed before the song ends.

Model: Teacher puts song on and models the wrong way to do it. Teacher does not go right to carpet. Teacher wanders around looking at other things in room and talking to students. Teacher is not seated when song ends, but sits after the song is over. Teacher asks class what he did wrong. Then asks if someone else can show him the right way to do it. Teacher asks 3-4 volunteers to show the class the right way to transition and puts the song on again. Class says what the volunteers did right and what they can improve.

Practice: Teacher has whole class practice. Once everyone is at carpet and song is over, if they did it well then de-brief at carpet. Teacher points out students who did things correctly. ("Amy walked and didn't run." "John sat crisscross with his hands in his lap." "Isabel didn't talk." "I saw so many students keeping their hands to themselves." "I saw that James wanted to socialize on his way to carpet, but he made a better decision.") If it was messy and chaotic, have students return to desks, de-brief and have class try again or have small groups try one at a time.

Students need to be able to transition to tables, carpet, lining up, centers, etc. quickly and smoothly. Using a song or piece of music for transitions can be an excellent way to increase both the efficiency and enjoyment of transitions in the classroom as music both indicates it's time to transition and gives a length of time to do it in.

Choose a song and tell the students they will have the length of that song to complete a particular transition. An upbeat song can create a playful, positive atmosphere, but more importantly it takes the guesswork out of how long the kids have to complete the transition. You will find that as the song progresses, the students will start to speed up, because they know the song is about to end! No more hounding them to hurry or telling them they have one more minute. The song does all the work for you.

Transition Tips:

Transitions songs work best for daily or weekly routines that have the tendency to be chaotic as students draw them out longer than necessary. These include, but are not limited to, the first minutes of class (hanging up jackets, turning in homework folder, taking down chair, sitting quietly), cleaning up/putting materials away, lining up at the door, packing up/readiness for dismissal, rotating through centers, and mid-lesson brain-breaks.

Once you choose a song for a particular transition, use that song for at least a month. Using the same song each time helps the students internalize how long they have, based on the anticipated end of that song. If you change the song every day, they can never anticipate how far away from the end they are or how much time they have left.

If you want to use a 4-minute pop song, but you only want a 40 second transition, no worries. Just always play the last 40 seconds of the song. The kids don't have to hear the whole song, but the song has to end. There are many apps that will allow you to edit songs down to exactly the piece and length you want.

Choose a song you think your students will like. After the first month, when you are ready to choose a new song for a particular transition, let the students suggest songs to you.