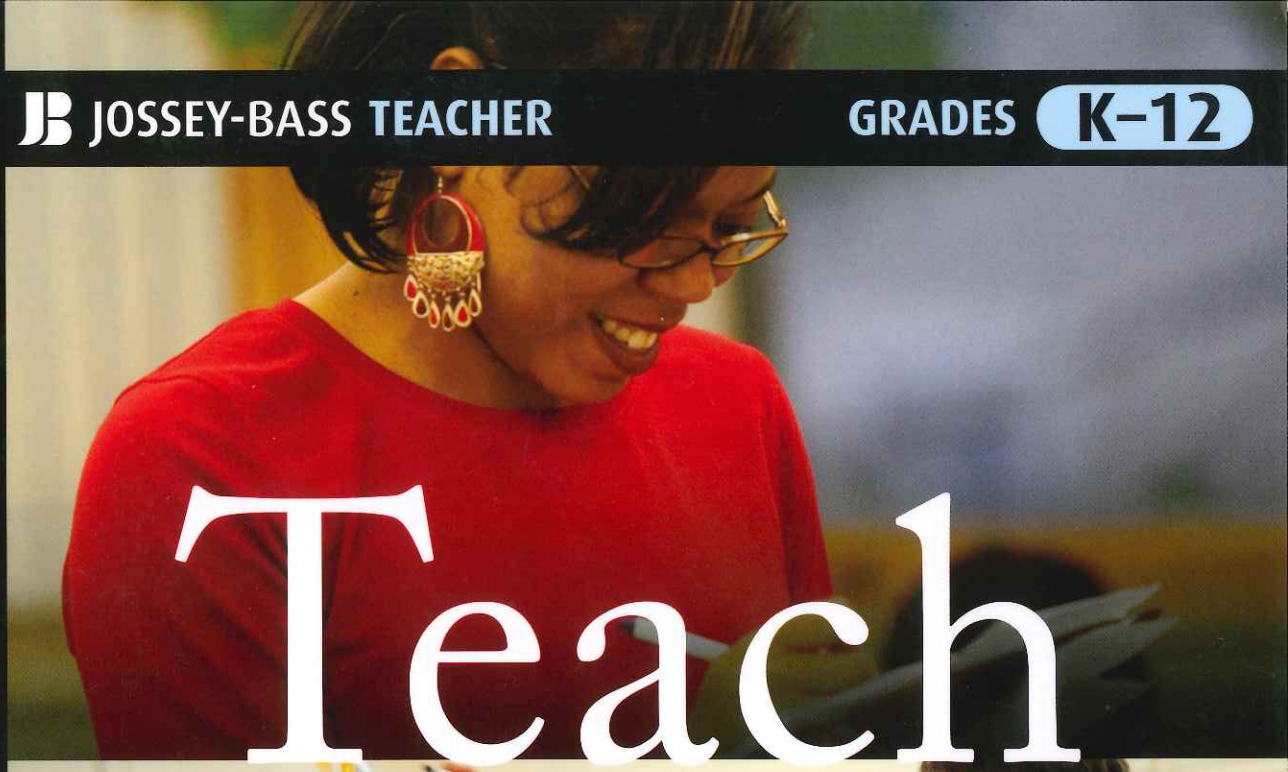
JOSSEY-BASS TEACHER

GRADES K–12

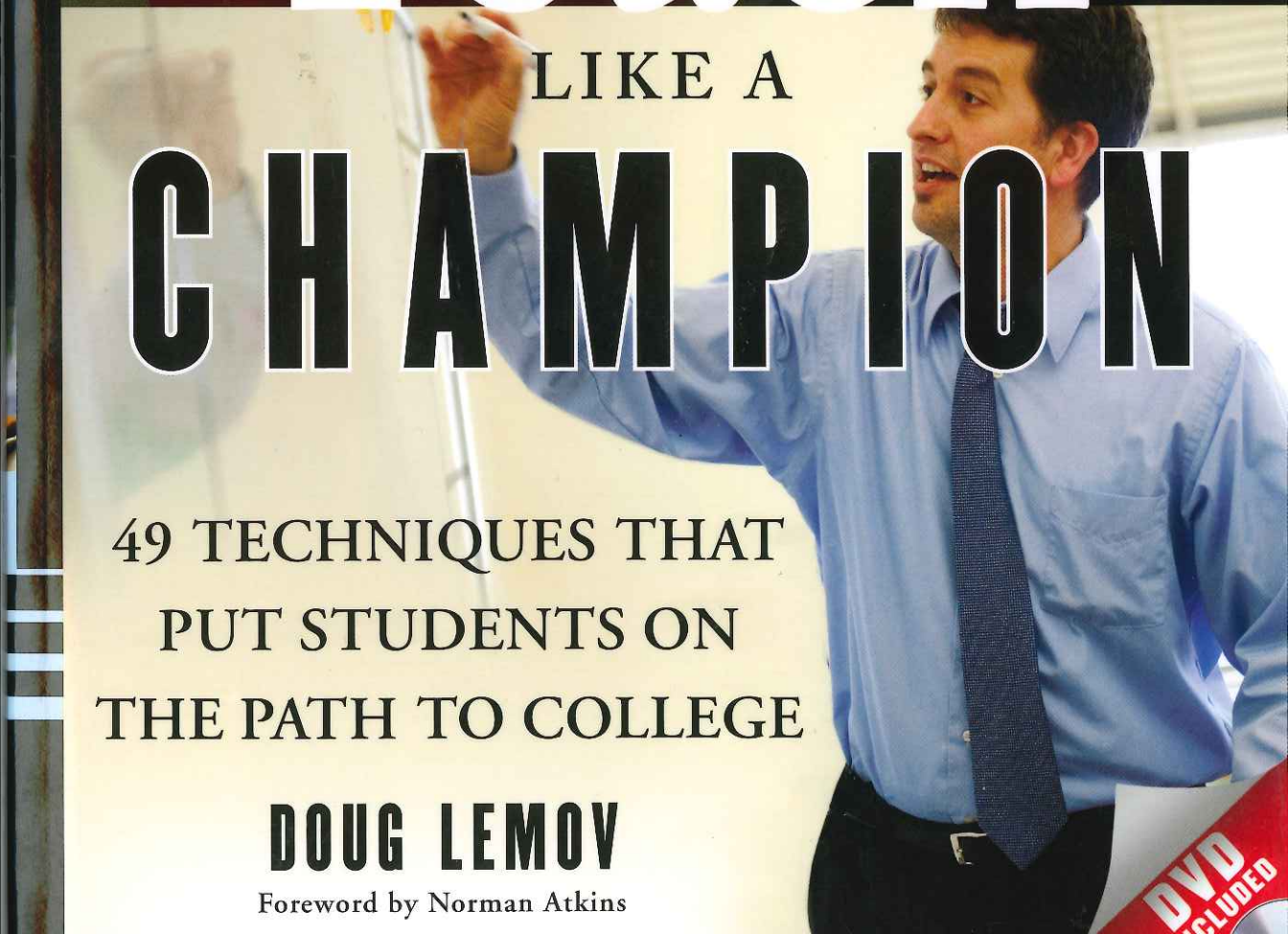


Teach LIKE A CHAMPION

49 TECHNIQUES THAT PUT STUDENTS ON THE PATH TO COLLEGE

DOUG LEMOV

Foreword by Norman Atkins



DVD INCLUDED

their classroom because they will not have had sufficient practice in or knowledge of how to sustain successful habits of scholarship.

While the techniques in this book make varying use of one or several of these principles (for example, technique 38, *Strong Voice*, is heavily focused on Control while technique 44, *Precise Praise*, is mostly about influence), the rest of this chapter focuses almost exclusively on Discipline and on the Systems and Routines that are the hidden foundation of any classroom culture.

TECHNIQUE 28
ENTRY ROUTINE

The first routine that affects classroom culture is the one for how students enter. Like all others, this is a routine whether you realize it (and shape it intentionally) or not. Unlike *Threshold* (technique 41 in Chapter Six), which immediately precedes students' entry into the room and focuses on setting behavioral norms and expectations, **Entry Routine** is about making a habit out of what's efficient, productive, and scholarly after the greeting and as students take their seats and class begins.

A typical routine begins with students entering the room and picking up a packet of materials from a small table just inside the door. In some cases, especially at the lower elementary grades, packets might already be at students' desks. A couple of key points maximize the effectiveness of this part of the entry routine.

- It's far more efficient to have students pick up their packets from a table than it is for you to try to hand the packets to them at the door. That only slows you down and forces you to multitask when your mind should be on setting behavioral expectations and building relationships. It's also far more efficient to have students pick up their packets from a table than it is for you to try to hand them out to them later while they sit and wait for them.
- Students should know where to sit. Milling around looking for a seat or deciding where to sit or talking about deciding where to sit ("Can I sit next to him? Will he think I'm flirting?") are all examples of wasted time and energy. Assign seats, or allow students to sign up for regular seats.

- Whatever students need to do with homework (put it in a basket, place it on the front left corner of their desk, pass it to a proctor), they should do the same way every day without prompting.
- A *Do Now* (the following technique) should be in the same place every day: on the board or in the packet. The objectives for the lesson, the agenda, and the homework for the coming evening should be on the board already, also in the same predictable place every day.

TECHNIQUE 29
DO NOW

Students should never have to ask themselves, "What am I supposed to be doing?" when they enter your classroom, nor should they be able to claim not to know what they should be doing. You want students to know what to do and to know there is no ambiguity here. Those two goals—being clear with students about what to be working on and eliminating the excuses that lead to distraction—are the rationale for **Do Now**, a short activity that you have written on the board or is waiting at their desks before they enter.

The *Do Now* means that students are hard at work even before you have fully entered the room. They are both productive during every minute and ready for instruction as soon as you start. They have done the anticipatory set and are thinking about what's coming.

An effective *Do Now,* which can bring incredible learning power to a room, should conform to four critical criteria to ensure that it remains focused, efficient, and effective:

1. Students should be able to complete the *Do Now* without any direction from the teacher and without any discussion with their classmates. Some teachers misunderstand the purpose of the *Do Now* and use a version of the technique that requires them to explain to their students what to do and how to do it: "Okay, class, you can see that the *Do Now* this morning asks you to solve some typical problems using area. Remember that to solve area problems, you have to multiply." This defeats the purpose of establishing a self-managed habit of productive work.
2. The activity should take three to five minutes to complete.

3. The activity should require putting a pencil to paper, that is, there should be a written product from it. This not only makes it more rigorous and more engaging, but it allows you to better hold students accountable for doing it since you can clearly see whether they are (and they can see that you can see).
4. The activity should preview the day's lesson (you are reading *The Jacket,* and the *Do Now* asks students to write three sentences about what they'd do if they thought someone stole their little brother's favorite jacket) or review a recent lesson (you want your kids to practice all of the standards they've mastered recently so they don't forget them).

Beyond that, a *Do Now* works because of consistency and preparation. If there isn't a *Do Now* in the same place every single day, students can claim plausible deniability. That said, a *Do Now* doesn't need to be written on the board. If you do post it on the board, you can write it in advance on a large piece of newsprint and tape or use a magnet to affix it to the board before students walk in, thus saving precious moments when you would otherwise be transcribing the *Do Now* onto the board.

For example, a fifth-grade English teacher might use a *Do Now* to review a vocabulary word from the previous week. Because the important thing is for students to be able to do the work on their own, she would have already set the precedent that students could and should use their notes as necessary:

In your notebook:

1. *Define* scarce.
2. *Explain how it means more than just having a small amount of something.*
3. *Use* scarce *in a sentence that tells about a time when something being scarce affected you or your family.*
4. *Name the noun form of* scarce.

This example is from a math class:

1. *Solve to find the width of a rectangle with an area of 104 square centimeters and a length of 13 centimeters. Show your work.*
2. *Give the possible dimensions of at least two other rectangles with the same area but different dimensions.*

TECHNIQUE 30
TIGHT TRANSITIONS

TRANSITIONS FOR STUDENTS

Having quick and routine transitions that students can execute without extensive narration by the teacher—that is, **Tight Transitions**—is a critical piece of any highly effective classroom. By transitions, I mean times when students move from place to place or activity to activity, for example, when they line up for lunch. Your students spend a lot of time in transition—by necessity—and when they're in transition, they are not learning. The transitions in high school (putting materials away before a test, say) look different from the transitions in elementary school (moving to the carpet from desks, say). Still, they occur at all levels of school and have an immense if generally underacknowledged influence on the learning that happens before and after. If you were able to cut a minute apiece from ten transitions a day and sustained that improvement for two hundred school days, you would have created almost thirty-five hours of instructional time over the school year. Practically speaking you would have added a week to your school year.

Messy transitions are also an invitation to disruptions and conflicts that continue to undercut the classroom environment even after class has started.

You can read all day long and well into the night about the need for more resources in public education but every teacher has, at his or her fingertips, an opportunity to increase the scarcest and most important resource that money buys by a significant amount. Furthermore, the time that's wasted in poor transitions often winds up being especially critical. It's often the difference between getting through an exciting lesson and running out of time—an outcome that means failing to complete critical summative activities like recapping and reviewing the lesson or introducing homework. Losing the last three minutes of a lesson undercuts the whole lesson. Messy transitions are also an invitation to disruptions and conflicts that continue to undercut the classroom environment even after class has started. In short, the price of poor transitions is high, and since only consistently effective procedures ensure smooth and speedy transitions, teachers should seek to practice doing it the same way every time until students can follow through as a matter of habit.

By the end of the first week of school, every student should know and understand procedures like how to line up and move from place to place without having to be told. In an effective classroom, transitions take less than thirty seconds, and often far less. To engineer effective transitions in your classroom, start by mapping the route. There is one right way to line up, one path each student follows on the way to the reading area, the door, or some other place. Your students should follow the same path every time. Then they need to practice under your watchful eye, often multiple times a day. You instincts will tell you that you are wasting time, but the opposite is true. Look at it as making an investment. Save hours and hours over the course of the year by investing an extra five or ten minutes for the first few days of school.

When you teach students to transition effectively, scaffold the steps in the transition. That is, teach them to follow their route one step at a time. One especially effective way to do this is to number your steps. You might announce to a class of third graders: "When I say one, please stand and push in your chairs. When I say two, please turn to face the door. When I say three, please follow your line leader to the place to line up." Once you've done that, you merely have to call the number for the appropriate step. But in calling the number (or not calling it), you can control the pace of the transition, slowing it down as necessary to ensure success and accountability, speeding it up as students are ready, and ultimately dispensing with the numbers and merely saying, "When I say *go*, please line up," and observing as your students follow the steps. You should expect such a process to take several weeks to instill completely.

Another effective way to teach transitions is to use a method called point-to point movement or, when transitions cause you to move around the building, point-to-point walking. You identify a location or an action, and students move to that point and stop, as in, "Please walk to the end of the hallway and stop there, Jason." The key is that as you instruct students to complete a step in the transition, you set not only a beginning but a stopping point in advance so that the activity never gets out of your control. You know students will walk only to the end of the hall. If they aren't quiet enough, you can call them back right away rather than watch them wend around the corner and out of sight, barely within your influence, never mind control.

With point-to-point and other scaffolding methods, your goals are both speed and orderliness. You need to get your students to be fast. This is an area that many teachers forget when the success of control goes to their heads. They ratchet down on every step and accept slow and orderly transitions because they make them feel as if they are in control. Both to challenge your students

and set goals for them and also to discipline yourself to focus on speed, practice transitions against the clock, preferably with a stopwatch, forever trying to get your students to be a little faster. "We did this in sixteen seconds yesterday; let's shoot for twelve today!"

Also control what your students say during transitions. If your transitions are quick enough, there's no reason they can't be silent, thereby avoiding distractions from students arguing and squabbling and focusing them on the transition more clearly.

As an alternative, you might do as Sultana Noormuhammad does at Leadership Preparatory Charter School and have your students sing their transitions. One morning they stood behind their desks as a student led them through their fight song, an adapted version of the fight song of their namesake, Indiana University, in which students sing about their willingness to do homework and work hard. Before the song ends, they're marching to the reading area, in perfect rows unwinding counterclockwise around their table groups and singing at the top of their lungs as they take their place in line. Their song ends as they sit on the carpet, ending the transition free of distraction, right on cue and with the mood high. Five seconds later, teaching has begun. And although Noormuhammad's students are kindergartners, if you think older kids can't sing their transition think again, this time of the armed forces, where soldiers routinely sing songs as they move from place to place for much the same purpose: to keep their mood up, focus them on the task, and avoid distractions.

Finally, you'll need consistent enforcement. When your students start testing to see if they really have to follow the rules of the road, they should always find that they do. *Do It Again* (technique 39 in Chapter Six) is especially effective in helping students practice doing transitions correctly since you are always right in the middle of something you can try over again and since transitions are the ideal time for group responsibility.

MOVING MATERIALS

The necessity (and most of the rules) for efficient transitions applies just as much when materials rather than people are moving from place to place. Invest at the outset in teaching one right way to do it. Work with a stopwatch, and practice over and over. Gain time for instruction by making these times in your day speedy and seamless. For passing and collecting papers, books, and other materials to and from students, there are a couple of additional rules of thumb:

- Generally pass across rows, not up and back. This avoids the need for turning around 180 degrees in chairs, an action that creates a golden opportunity for

hard-to-see, hard-to-manage face-to-face interactions in which one person always has his or her back to you.

- Distribute materials in groups: to the student at the end of each row, to each table.

SEE IT IN ACTION: CLIP 13

TIGHT TRANSITIONS AND POSITIVE FRAMING

In clip 13 on the DVD, Doug McCurry models *Tight Transitions.* I discuss this clip in the Introduction to the book as well because of the incredible return on Doug's invested time in teaching his students to pass out papers. What's equally powerful about the clip is the students' response. Far from being annoyed and frustrated by being asked to pass papers back and forth to achieve a faster time, they love the challenge and are literally on the edge of their seats. Much of the key to accomplishing this alchemy is Doug's *Positive Framing* (technique 43 in Chapter Seven), specifically his constant use of challenge.

TECHNIQUE 31

BINDER CONTROL

Certain freedoms are overrated: the freedom to lose papers, for example, or the freedom to take notes on a grubby, torn half-sheet of paper that ultimately becomes buried at the bottom of a backpack. Care enough about and demonstrate the importance of what you teach to build a system for the storage, organization, and recall of what your students have learned. The technique for this is **Binder Control**. Have a required place for them to take notes; have that

Care enough about and demonstrate the importance of what you teach to build a system for the storage, organization, and recall of what your students have learned.