

# Resources for Children’s Literacy Tutors

## Summer Reads



**Title:** 5 Strategies for Behavior Management in a Virtual Classroom

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**Target audience:** Middle school youth; Elementary school children

### Topic(s):

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### Format:

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### About Summer Reads:

This children’s literacy tutor resource was created by Summer Reads VISTA members. Summer Reads is an [AmeriCorps VISTA national service](https://www.americorps.gov/vista) program of Literacy Minnesota. For 8 weeks over the summer, Summer Reads VISTA members volunteer full-time as children’s/youth literacy mentors in schools, libraries and out-of-school-time programs across Minnesota. They bring literacy to life for low-income students through a variety of activities – one-on-one tutoring, creative enrichment activities like using arts and drama to explore language or practicing vocabulary and comprehension in science and other subjects. They also connect students and parents/caregivers to community resources through wrap-around basic needs support. At the same time, the VISTA members build their own leadership, explore career paths, pay for college and become lifelong advocates for the communities they serve due to the power of their experience. [www.literacymn.org/summerreads](http://www.literacymn.org/summerreads)

# 5 Strategies for Behavior Management in a Virtual Classroom

**Here are five strategies for managing behavior in a virtual classroom.** These strategies are focused on synchronous classrooms, but some tips may apply to asynchronous classrooms as well.

The objective of this resource is to equip VISTAs, teachers, and tutors to become more than managers in their classrooms, instead leading their students to become responsible community members and active, independent learners. With the flexibility of a virtual classroom, teachers and tutors have the opportunity to present students with an innovative learning environment that is centered on engaged learning. Look through our additional resources for tools and tips on engaging learners, activities for virtual tutoring, building community in the virtual classroom, and more.

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# 5 STRATEGIES

## for Behavior Management in a Virtual Classroom



### #1: PRIORITIZE ENGAGEMENT

**WHY?** Engaged students will be less likely to disrupt class.

**HOW?** Get to know your students' interests and experiences, and design your lessons and activities with that in mind

### #2: CREATE A CONSISTENT ROUTINE

**WHY?** Routines help students focus on learning.

**HOW?** Common routines include morning meetings, bell-ringers, and exit tickets. Be consistent!



### #3: COMMUNICATE CLEARLY

**WHY?** Communication is limited in virtual classrooms.

**HOW?** Plan what you are going to say and find the best method of communication for your students.

### #4: BUILD COMMUNITY

**WHY?** Students who feel connected are less likely to act out.

**HOW?** Make community building a part of your routine. Create space for every student to participate.



### #5: MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

**WHY?** It is easy to get distracted in a virtual classroom.

**HOW?** Be proactive! Remind students to remove distractions before class starts.

## Strategy #1 In Depth: Prioritize Engagement

- ★ **WHY:** In a virtual classroom, students will not follow expectations, or even come to class, if they are not engaged. While learning how to engage students online is a challenge, it does present a positive opportunity to take engagement to the next level when traditional measures such as detention are out of the question. Engaged students will be much less likely to disrupt class.



- ★ **WHAT:** Engagement refers to connecting to students' interests and strengths when designing activities. Teachers and tutors have unique tools for engaging students in virtual classrooms, including increasing student choice, online group games, and tapping into students' technological savvy. Peer interaction, teacher presence, connection to real-life experiences, and humor are tried-and-true strategies that engage students.

- ★ **HOW:** Get to know your students: what are their interests? where are their strengths? what do their daily lives look like? Each student is unique, so provide multiple options whenever possible. Take advantage of the many innovative online games and websites available for education, and make your content come alive for students. Alternatively, encourage students to work on hands-on activities (writing, building, going outside) away from their screens. Avoid long lectures or explanations, and instead unleash students to engage in active learning and problem solving.



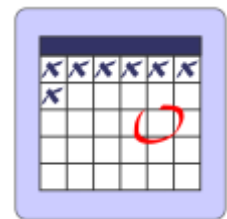
- ★ **ASYNCHRONOUS:** Build in opportunities to get to know your students into the class, such as contacting them individually at the start of the class. Consider students' interests and experiences when designing learning activities and tools (videos? reading? educational games?). If possible, host a few community building video calls or game times.

## Strategy #2 In Depth: Create a Consistent Routine



★ **WHY:** Routines help students focus on their learning and feel safe in the classroom, by creating predictability, simplifying interactions, and increasing the time spent productively. When students come to class knowing what to expect, routines free them from having to navigate an unknown.

- ★ **WHAT:** Consistency is the key to effective routines. Within their virtual classrooms, teachers and tutors should seek to create consistency around scheduling, grouping, activities, homework, and interactions. Especially when students are at home, creating a routine of (for example) checking in at the start of class or gathering materials before starting a project will foster consistency. Routines in a virtual classroom might also include dress code, when to unmute your microphone, and sharing of work done.
- ★ **HOW:** Explain your activity plans clearly at the start of the day and walk students through routines step-by-step until they are familiar with them. Set aside time during the first days or week of class specifically for explaining and practicing routines. If possible, keep the schedule consistent, and display it visibly on the class site or on a slide. High school students need different routines than kindergarteners, so keep your students' unique needs in mind when creating routines. Expect that students will need a few days or weeks to settle into their routines.
- ★ **ASYNCHRONOUS:** Set a routine of when you will post the daily/weekly activities, due dates for assignments, and class times, and keep it consistent. Specifically encourage students to organize their materials. Make the order in which work should be completed visible on the course website. Explain norms and expectations for commenting on others' work, asking questions, and communicating with you.



## Strategy #3 In Depth: Communicate Clearly



★ **WHY:** Communicating in online classrooms is challenging because it is so different from face-to-face communication. Teachers and tutors face limitations to communication in online classrooms, such as lag between video and audio, so intentional planning is needed to facilitate effective communication.

- ★ **WHAT:** Effective communication in an online classroom requires planning ahead, because of the limitations and student needs. Consider the norms surrounding etiquette in video calls and interaction outside of class time. Teaching *is* communication, so ensure that 1) your message is clear and 2) that your students receive it. Thus, delivering information in an effective way will reduce behavior issues, by minimizing confusion and misbehavior.
- ★ **HOW:** Start by making sure that your message is clear in your own mind before you start talking or send an email (lesson planning!). Then, think of your students' needs and preferred methods of communication: will they understand most clearly by verbal reminder, lecture, drawing, or other method? Will they be more likely to interact in the chat or by talking to the group? Nonverbal communication (hand signals, facial expression, etc.) can be used in innovative ways in video calls. Planning how students can ask their questions in class is also important, to minimize confusion and interruptions. Explain how students can contact you with questions outside of class hours.
- ★ **ASYNCHRONOUS:** Find a way to communicate with students that is accessible for them, such as email, website, online classroom, etc. Find a way to pull all of the important information together into one, easily-accessed location (such as Google Classroom, Moodle, or etc.). Communicate with them on a regular basis and let them know how they can contact you with questions.



## Strategy #4 In Depth: Build Community

- ★ **WHY:** One website described community building as “proactive classroom management,” because students who feel connected will be kinder and more cooperative. Community building also helps students to feel less isolated, which is especially important when they are unable to interact with their peers face-to-face at school. The relationships that students build with their teachers, tutors, and peers contribute to students’ social and emotional health, which is just as important as their academic growth.



- ★ **WHAT:** While community building touches on all aspects of the online classroom, it can take the form of activities at the beginning of class to help students get to know each other. Appropriate community building activities vary according to the age of students. In asynchronous classes, students might post introductions to a forum, have a partner to connect with, or participate in weekly video calls. Students can also get to know each other by giving feedback on a project or playing a game together.



- ★ **HOW:** Create a routine of integrating community building into the schedule. Some teachers start class with a short game or sharing time, but even taking the time to listen to and answer student questions contributes to positive relationships. Encourage students to ask questions. Intentionally listen to students, whether in a video call or through emails and texts. One challenge in online classrooms is ensuring equity for individual students to be heard and acknowledged, so offer students multiple ways to interact with their classmates and encourage every student to make their voice heard.
- ★ **ASYNCHRONOUS:** Emphasize community building when the class starts, by having students make a slideshow with pictures to introduce themselves or pairing students up for projects. If you have a large class, making smaller groups of students will help them feel more confident and connected.



## Strategy #5 In Depth: Minimize Distractions

- ★ **WHY:** Distractions should be minimized because they take students away from learning and make it hard to communicate. Distractions abound in virtual classrooms, even while teachers and tutors have less control over removing distractions. Thus, teachers and tutors need to have a plan in place for minimizing distractions.
- ★ **WHAT:** Before class, anticipate potential distractions and how you will minimize or avoid them. Background noise, siblings or pets, toys, and other digital tools running in the background are all potential (and likely) distractions. Determine what you will expect in terms of muting microphones during class and how you will enforce expectations. By encouraging students to minimize distractions proactively, you will reduce the disruptions and the need for redirection during class.
- ★ **HOW:** At the beginning of class, give students time to find and remove distractions by moving to a quiet room or closing other browser tabs. Set the expectation that each participant is responsible for minimizing distractions. Frame this responsibility as a sign of respect for other classmates, rather than a negative command. When students interrupt with off-topic or unkind comments, respond quickly and remind them of the expectation. Be proactive, rather than waiting until the disruption actually happens. However, have grace for unavoidable distractions.
- ★ **ASYNCHRONOUS:** Although minimizing distractions is largely up to the student in asynchronous learning, teachers and tutors can model doing so. You could post a list of actions you take to minimize distractions or have a discussion about it with students.





## Challenging Scenarios & Potential Responses

- ★ Some challenging behaviors may still happen even after you have worked hard to create an engaging virtual classroom. Responding appropriately can help prevent them from becoming a pattern. Here are some effective responses to scenarios in a virtual classroom:
  
- ★ A student keeps talking when their mic should be muted:
  - “Everyone, please make sure your mic is off.”
  - “I hear you, Sam, and we will discuss that at the end of class.”
  - “Remember that we keep our mics off while the teacher is talking. I appreciate that you are here.”
  
- ★ A student walks away from the camera during class:
  - Recognize that students may have just gone to use the bathroom, get their parent, etc.
  - Hold up an object to the camera: “If you can see me, tell me what shape I am holding.”
  - “Come back to the call and let me know when you are ready to work.”
  - Stop talking – if the student is listening they will notice.
  
- ★ A student has both camera and mic off, making it hard to tell if they are listening:
  - “Drop an emoji in the chat if you can hear me.”
  - “I’m not sure if you can hear me. Please say yes or type in the chat if you are still here.”
  - Rely on the chat box. The student may engage more by writing instead of speaking.
  
- ★ A student interrupts with an off-topic question or comment:
  - “Thank you for sharing that. Please save that thought for the end of class.”
  - “Let’s stay focused. I need you to \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - Ask a question: “What should you be doing right now?” not “Stop doing that!”
  
- ★ A student sends inappropriate messages or comments:
  - “Let’s keep this school-appropriate.”
  - “Is that comment kind or necessary?”
  - “We don’t say things like that in our classroom.”

## Positive Responses to Disruptions

### ★ **Keep it short:**

- “I’ll wait until you \_\_\_\_.”
- “Please show me you are ready.”
- “This makes me sad.”

### ★ **Give students a choice:**

- “I’ll begin when everyone mutes their microphone.”
- “I allow students to make comments that are kind and necessary.”
- “I teach when there are no distractions or background noise.”

### ★ **Hit pause:**

- Stop talking. Mid sentence. The student will notice!
- “I will wait until you are ready.”

### ★ **Ask questions:**

- “What did I just say?”
- “What should our desks look like right now?”
- “What is our rule about \_\_\_\_?”
- “How do we get ready for sharing time?”

### ★ **Re-engage students:**

- “Please be ready to share after the next student.”
- “Please show me what you made.”
- “I’m going to call on you in 1 min. Please be ready to share.”

### ★ **Show care:**

- “I appreciate your energy.”
- “I am glad you are here.”
- “I can tell you are excited about \_\_\_\_.”

### ★ **Avoid embarrassment:**

- Remember, the student is being watched by the whole class.
- Provide correction while the other students are busy, if possible.

### ★ **More strategies:** [Redirecting behavior](#) and [Love and Logic](#).