The crush of managing a large, multi-level classroom or encountering planning time crunches can frustrate many teachers. We also want to see our students come to class on time and more often. Crafting classroom routines that engage students and reinforce learning not only supports learners but carves more time for teachers to plan and develop lesson content. In this handout, you can find several creative routines with helpful tips on how to implement them in your classroom.
Questions and Notes from the Session – MN ABE Summer Institute, August 19th, 2011

What is your favorite classroom routine?

Why use classroom routines?

Can classroom routines save time? How?

How are learners affected by classroom routines?

How do classroom routines help teachers with lesson planning?

How do classroom routines affect classroom management?

Are classroom routines difficult to implement? Why or why not?

What makes a great routine?

What do great routines have in common?

In what ways do classroom routines help teachers and students thrive?
Using classroom routines to engage students and reinforce learning not only supports learners but carves more time for teachers to plan and develop lesson content. Try crafting your own routines around these adaptable suggestions.

1. Classroom Greeter

This simple and fun routine gets students into the English-language mindset from the moment they step into the room.

It gives students a chance to make friends with their peers and work on real-life work skills such as eye contact and making introductions.

Student Objectives:
1. Students will be able to (SWBAT) use greetings and responses naturally
2. SWBAT quickly transition to the English-only environment of the ELL classroom

Materials:
1. Pre-teach greetings and responses, such as
   a. Hello! Hi!
   b. How are you? I’m fine. And you?
   c. How’s it going? Not bad. How about you?
2. Create a “cheat sheet” and post it near the door
3. A chair or stool for the greeter to use

Procedure:
1. Each day, arrive at the classroom 5 minutes early and choose a student, or
   Assign a student the role the night before, or
   Ask a student to be the greeter for the week
2. The greeter’s role is to use the greetings to say hello to every student who enters the classroom
3. The students’ role is to respond to the greeter using appropriate English
4. If students are already sitting in the classroom when your greeter arrives, they can go around to each person and use the greetings that way

2. Use a Bell or Other Signal for Transitions

Any kind of auditory or visual cue works great for helping students regroup after an activity. Use a bell or a noisemaker. Raise your hand and wait for everyone else to do so. Turn the lights off and on. Write on the board, “Please open your notebooks and take out a pencil.” Be creative!
3. Sort Students Into Groups
Using Colored Cards or
Other Cues

Giving participants two
differently-colored cards
helps assign roles visually
and non-verbally.

Students can quickly grasp
the meaning behind the
cards to move on to thinking
about lesson content.

Student Objectives:
1. SWBAT move quickly into groups for group work
2. SWBAT understand their roles for an activity

Materials:
1. Pairs of cards cut from 8 ½” x 11” paper or cardstock of
two different colors
2. Words, numbers, or images in groups, such as “A, B, C, D”
or “head, shoulders, knees, toes”

Procedure:
1. The teacher passes out the colored cards to students
2. Students partner up according to the teacher’s instructions
   a. Example: 10 red cards and 10 green cards
      “Find a person with a different color.”
   b. Example: 5 pink cards and 15 blue cards
      “Pink card holders, find 3 people with blue cards
      for your group.”

Colored cards work great in
lines and group work

Line work
“If you have a green card, your job is to ASK the question.”
“If you have a red card, your job is to LISTEN and ANSWER the
question.”

Group work
“If you have a pink card, you go first. It’s your turn.”
“When your turn is done, give your card to the person on your
left.” This assigns a new person the role.

Other cues: using words to
sort students into groups

Procedure:
1. Tell the students the group items:
   “Let’s think about the words ‘head, shoulders, knees,
toes.’”
2. Show the students the group destination:
   “If you are ‘head,’ sit here, in the front. If you are
   ‘shoulders,’ sit there, in the back.” And so on.
3. Review the group destinations with the students:
   “Where does ‘head’ sit?”
4. Go around the room, giving each student a word from the
group
5. Ask each student to repeat their word back to check for
   comprehension
6. Tell the students to move to their new group
4. Use Students as Classroom Assistants

Using students to pass out papers, markers, and other supplies saves the teacher time and gives students the chance to participate fully in the lesson.

Not only that, it provides real-life skills development, including listening to, comprehending and acting on verbal direction.

Routinely ask students to erase the board after an activity is finished. Ask one person from each group to come get a piece of poster paper and the markers. Ask for student volunteers to pass out materials.

5. Use Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers give students a structure and context for otherwise difficult tasks, such as asking and answering questions, interviewing one another, and organizing information.

Familiarizing students with the way charts sort and organize information helps them acquire a very useful life and work skill as well.

Ask a question such as, “What is your favorite color?” Pass out the graphic organizers. This is a great time to practice the skills of asking for and talking about personal information in addition to the interview question.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Favorite Color</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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With this structure, students can practice thinking of the appropriate question. For more complicated questions, have them copy the question at the top of their paper or refer to a prompt.

If you don’t have access to a computer, a copier, or just want to save paper, you can have the students create this chart in their notebooks instead, giving them a great opportunity to follow directions.

Follow up to this activity includes telling a partner about the results using third-person statements or creating graphs to describe the results visually.
6. Use Cards (or Post-its, Scraps of Paper, etc) for Student Input

When studying vocabulary or grammar, you can use cards or post-its to collect student input quickly.

Have each person write one word or sentence on a post-it, then collect and redistribute the papers.

Ask the new students to categorize, sort, write a question or make corrections. The possibilities are nearly endless.

Using Post-its for Vocabulary Work: Categorizing

1. Put the students into small groups
2. Pass out a picture dictionary, or brainstorm together as a class before the activity
3. Choose a category, such as “food”
4. Have students in the groups write as many different words, one on each post-it, as they can find or think of
5. When finished, have the students post their notes on the board
6. For lower levels, the teacher can choose categories. For higher levels, the students can suggest categories.
7. Write the categories on the board, such as “fruit, dairy, grains, meat, vegetables”
8. Have the students come back to the board and move the post-its to the correct categories
9. Review the results

Using Cards for Grammar Work: Writing Questions

1. Give each student a large card (1/4 of an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper)
2. Ask the students to write one sentence on the card. It is helpful to choose a topic, such as “my favorite color” or “what I did last weekend”
3. Have a student helper gather the cards together
4. Redistribute the cards
5. Have the students read the sentence, then write a question about it
6. Redistribute the cards
7. Have the student read the question and the answer to the class and discuss the results together

7. Attendance Charts

Laminate an attendance chart and use wet-erase markers, or print off spreadsheets for each class to post on the wall. Have students mark each day they attend class. The teacher can write a number on days students are absent, showing how many absences each student is accumulating throughout the quarter.

Giving students this responsibility helps encourage them to commit to coming to class. In my class, students are given and “exc” for each day they call in with an excuse. They respond well to this system and many students will overcome their fear of using the telephone in English to avoid getting that big red number.
8. Story Time after Break

Reading aloud is a great way to give students extra reading practice and improve literacy. It also helps to minimize disruptions by latecomers after a break.

Use Minnesota Literacy Council’s student publication *Journeys*, or current news events, such as those on Voice of America’s Learning English news site to give the students high interest paragraphs to work on.

http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/home/

This activity provides listening practice, reading practice, comprehension work, and more.

Student Objectives:

1. SWBAT listen to a story and understand the main idea.
2. SWBAT improve comprehension of spoken language.
3. SWBAT practice reading out loud and work on their pronunciation of unfamiliar words.
4. SWBAT work with a partner to solve a problem.
5. SWBAT answer questions about a story.

Materials:

1. Index cards
2. Photocopies of a paragraph from a story (make one copy for every 2 students)
3. 5-6 questions about the story

Procedure:

1. Before class, glue the story to one side and the questions to the other side of the index card. Make one card for every 2 students (total prep time for a class of 24, or 12 sets, is about 15 minutes).
2. First, the teacher reads the paragraph out loud to the students. Stop and discuss any interesting or new vocabulary the first time. Use a running narrative to give students a chance to “think” in English, but make sure to let the students know that now is just the time to listen. They will have a chance to talk and ask questions later.
3. The teacher reads the paragraph again, straight through.
4. Pass out the index cards to the partners. Read the paragraph again.
5. Ask the students if there are any new words they’d like to discuss.
6. Ask the students to read the story out loud to their partners, then switch who is reading and listening.
7. Turn the cards over and read through the questions out loud together as a class.
8. Ask the students to use the information in the story to answer the questions.
9. When the students are finished working, discuss each question together as a class.
9. File Box

Using a file box to organize student work can save a teacher a lot of time and photocopies. It also helps students acquire a familiarity with filing systems and alphabetical order.

Whenever there is class work, have the students put their work into their folders when they are finished. They can continue to work on the activity the next class period.

Any time you give a handout, ask the students to file it away and you won’t have to worry about students forgetting their papers at home. Don’t hesitate to ask the students to retrieve their folders out of the box, then file them again later. It’s great practice.

Materials:
1. A letter-sized hanging file box
2. 6-8 hanging files
3. Manila file folders, one for each student

Procedure:
1. Create alphabetical groups for the hanging files, such as “A-D”, “E-H”, “I-M”, “N-Q”, “R-V”, and “W-Z” for your class. Look at your attendance chart and try to space the groups of students out so there aren’t too many folders in each file.
2. Give each student a manila folder.
3. Students write their last name, then their first name, on the tab of the folder.
4. On the front of their folder, students write the first letter of their last name very large, across the entire folder.
5. Ask the students to bring their folders with them out into a hallway or place where you can line up and move around.
6. Say the ABCs together.
7. Ask the students to stand in alphabetical order from left to right in the hallway (introduce the concept of “alphabetical order” in a previous lesson, including discussing what to do if the first letters are the same).
8. Hold your folder out so everyone can see the letters.
9. Say the alphabet again, each student holding his or her folder up high when their letter is called. Discuss any students with the same letter or even the same last name and how to resolve this alphabetically.
10. Go back to the classroom. Present the file box.
11. Show the students how groups of letters work. Write “A-D” on the board and ask those students to come to the front and show their folders.
12. Have those students put their folders in the file. Teach how to file folders with the name on the tab facing front.
13. Repeat steps 11-12 for the other groups of students.

Create student work portfolios quickly and easily

At the end of the quarter, pass out colored paper and have the students create a cover sheet with their name, the name of your class, and the dates of the quarter. Ask them to sort their papers in their folders and recycle anything they don’t want to keep.

Straighten all the work and staple it along the left side to the cover sheet, like a book. Give the students their work this way and you can reuse the folders next quarter or recycle them for new students!
10. Today’s Date

This routine provides a chance for students to review ordinals, order of operations, and how to say the date in different ways.

It also gently introduces students to the idea of speaking in front of the class and volunteering for different activities at the board, something that can be intimidating at first.

The key questions used in this activity are:

*What day is it today?*
*What month is it today?*
*What is the date today?*
*What year is it today?*

Procedure:

Post a sentence template on the board that reads “Today is...” Ask the students, “What is today’s date?”

The first week:

1. The teacher asks, “What is today’s date?”
2. Lead the class in writing and saying the sentence: “Today is Monday, June 10th, 2011.”
3. Ask for feedback from the students. What comes first? Second? Third? Fourth? (The day, the month, the date, the year.) What makes the “date” different than a number?

The second week:

1. The teacher passes the key questions on strips of paper out to volunteer students
2. Write a list on the board: DAY, MONTH, DATE, YEAR
3. Ask the student whose question has the answer “day” to read their question to the class from their seat
4. Answer the question as a class and write the information next to the list on the board:
   a. DAY – Monday
   b. MONTH – June
   c. DATE – 17th
   d. YEAR – 2011
5. Discuss what makes the date “17th” different than the number “17”
6. Use the information to write the sentence into the template to finish the activity
7. Review what questions yield which answers. Emphasize the difference between “What is the date today?” and “What is today’s date?”

The third week:

1. Pass out the questions to student volunteers
2. The teacher writes the list on the board: DAY, MONTH, DATE, YEAR
3. The student comes to the front to ask the class and writes their answer next to the word on the board
4. The teacher writes the sentence into the template following the students’ instructions
5. Review what questions yield which answers

The fourth week and beyond:

1. Continue as in the third week, but ask the final student at the board to choose a classmate who will write the sentence to answer the question, “What is today’s date?”
### Ideas for Routines in My Classroom

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<th>How to Implement</th>
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