
TRANSITIONS

Transitions are tricky. They are a time when chaos can easily erupt. 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.

Below are some tips for using songs for transition effectively, as well as three sample lesson plans.

Tips From the Trenches:

- 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.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN #1

Teacher: Jason S

Grade: 3rd

Lesson: Transitioning from Carpet to Desk

Aim: Student will be able to quickly transition from carpet to their desks and vice versa before the end of the “transition song.”

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 criss-cross 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 criss-cross 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.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN #2

Teacher: Anna D
Grade Level: 4th/5th Grade
Lesson: Music for Transitioning Back to Desks

Lesson Objective:

Students will finish their conversations quickly during activities where they are working away from their desks and get to their seats in a timely manner

Lesson Outline:

- ❖ My students do a lot of work in standing pairs and in groups away from their desks, in centers and also at the carpet, but they mess around and socialize when I tell them to go back to their original seats. So I will bring in the Mission Impossible theme song, which I edited in Garage Band to end after 40 seconds. I will use that as their transition song so they can have that 40 seconds to finish their conversations with their partner and get seated.
- ❖ I will play the song for them and tell them how we will use it.
- ❖ They will practice by getting up and talking to their elbow partner about their favorite movie or tv show for a minute and then I will put on the song and see if they can finish talking and get seated before it ends. We will do this a few times, with them getting into different pairs with different partners each time to talk about personal interests, so they can practice getting back to their seats in time and get used to the song.
- ❖ After that we will use it each time they are in standing pairs or in groups away from their desks and I need them to return to their seats.
- ❖ If some students don't get back to their desks in time after the first day we practice it then the next day those students will have to practice with me during free choice time until they can do it. If they continue to not follow the song correctly after that then they will lose all their free choice time and practice again and write me a letter describing how the transition should work. And they may get a phone call home.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN #3

Teacher: Aisha J

Grade Level: 2nd Grade

Lesson: Song for Clean-Up/Readiness

Instructional Goals:

- Students will clean up the floor, put materials away, clear their desks, and be ready to focus up front by the end of a transition song.

Lesson:

- Introduction: Introduce the clean-up song, “Happy” by Pharrell Williams. Explain that the song has been edited down to two minutes exactly and that when I put the song on it means they have those two minutes to get clear their desks (putting books and papers and pencils inside their desks), clean up the floor around their desks, put their group materials away in proper bins around the room, and match the readiness photo at the front of the room.
- Practice: Tell the students we are going to practice by working on a simple art activity (a collage, but with no cutting necessary, just gluing and taping) in table groups. I will have one student from each group (the group leader of the week) come and get all the materials for their table and I will show the class a sample of a completed project. Then I will let them work. After 10 minutes I will put the song on and they will try to put their tape and glue away, get their desks cleaned off, clean up any garbage on and around their desks, and be seated in polite position by the time the song ends. Then we will discuss and de-brief how well they did.
- Practice Again: Tell the students we are going to try again and try to do better with the clean-up (or equally as good). They will have 10 minutes to use colored pencils and pens and to add drawings or labels to their project and stickers to add more visuals. Again I will show a sample of a completed project. After 10 minutes I will put the clean-up song on and they will try and put their colored pencils, pens and stickers away, turn in their papers, get their desks cleaned off, clean up any garbage on and around their desks, and be seated in polite position by the time the song ends. Discuss and de-brief

Consequences and Incentives:

- When we are practicing the first day, there will be no consequences. Just reminders. The next day if a student or two is not cleaned up by the end I will have a private conversation with them and ask them if they understand the procedure and the expectation and ask them if they need help doing it. If they continue to not follow the procedure they will have to come in at recess to practice with me.
- If the whole class (or most of the class) is not doing the procedure correctly after the first day I will either lengthen the song (if I think that is the reason they aren’t getting it done on time) or we will practice and de-brief again.
- Tables that are done on time will get extra table points. And individuals who are done on time, but their table mates are not, will get a “good job” stamp on their hand.