Smooth Classroom Traffic

View a 'Classroom Traffic Light' Chart

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Jim's Hints for Using...
Smooth Classroom Traffic

As your class shows that it is able to lower noise levels and improve behaviors, you can gradually decrease the number of "Traffic Points" that you assign while increasing the minimum number of continuous minutes of green-light behavior required to earn those points.

This classwide program can help to reduce noise levels and head off disruptive behaviors before they occur.

Preparation:

Make a poster of a traffic light with red (top), yellow (middle), and green (bottom) lights. Put 3 Velcro tabs onthe left side of the poster, lined up with each of the lights. Make a pointer out of tag-board. Put a Velcro strip on the pointer so that it will stick to any of the three tabs on the poster.

Steps in Implementing This Intervention

Step 1: Select a menu of class rewards (e.g., pizza party, free time). For each reward, decide on how many "green light points" the class must earn to get the reward.

Step 2: Pick a time-period during the day when you will use the program. (Generally, it's a good idea to pick a time when you most want students to be attentive and working on academic tasks with a minimum of distractions (e.g., lecture, small-group work, independent seatwork)).

Step 3: Introduce the program to students. Tell them that you are starting a program to reward students for helping to make the classroom a place for effective learning. Each day, the class will start out with 10 "Traffic Points". Points will be deducted if the class (or any individual student) becomes too disruptive. Any points remaining at the end of the period can be saved and redeemed later for class rewards.

Present the behavioral standards that you will be using:

- **Green Light**-Noise level is low in the classroom. No students are acting disruptively. The teacher is able to teach rather than deal with behavior issues.

- **Yellow Ligh**t-Noise level is starting to climb and may begin to distract the teacher and /or students. One or more students may be starting to act disruptively

- **Red Light**-Noise level is too high for students and teacher to concentrate on academics. One or more students may be acting disruptively. The teacher must stop instruction to

address the student disruption.

Tell students that:

- If the noise level or disruptive student behavior starts to approach problem levels, you will give the class a single warning and move the arrow on the Traffic Light Chart into the yellow range.
- You will deduct one class "Traffic Point" each time you move the arrow on the Traffic Light Chart into the red zone because of a high noise level or disruptive student behavior
- For each full minute that the pointer is in the red zone, you will deduct an additional point from the class "Traffic Points".
- When student behaviors improve, you will move the arrow back from the yellow or red zone into the green zone on the Traffic Light Chart.
- As the teacher, you are the sole judge of whether student behavior is disruptive or class noise levels are too high. Any student complaints will result in your deducting additional points from the class "Traffic Points".
- The class is awarded any "Traffic Points" that remain at the end of the period provided that they have had at least 10 continuous minutes of green-light behavior during the class period. Otherwise, all points are lost.

Step 4: Start the program. At the beginning of each period, write the number of "Traffic Points" that the class is starting with on the board. Update on the board the number of "Traffic Points" that remain each time that a point is deducted.

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## *Troubleshooting: How to Deal With Common Problems in Using 'Smooth Classroom Traffic'*

Q: *I would like to try this strategy but when I am teaching, I am not sure that I can always get to the chart to change the pointer to match classroom behaviors. Do you have any ideas?*

If the classroom chart seems too cumbersome, you can dispense with it and simply "call out" the color zone that corresponds to the classroom's behaviors. For example, instead of moving the chart pointer to the yellow zone, you may call out to students, "OK, class. You are now in the yellow range. This is your only warning," "Class, your behavioral is unacceptable. You have now moved into the red zone. I am deducting a point from your Traffic Points.".

Even if you decide not to use the chart pointer, though, I recommend that (1) you still post a copy of the Traffic Light Chart as a visual reminder and behavioral prompt for students and (2) you still keep a careful running total of the class's remaining "Traffic Points".

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Classroom Noise Traffic Light
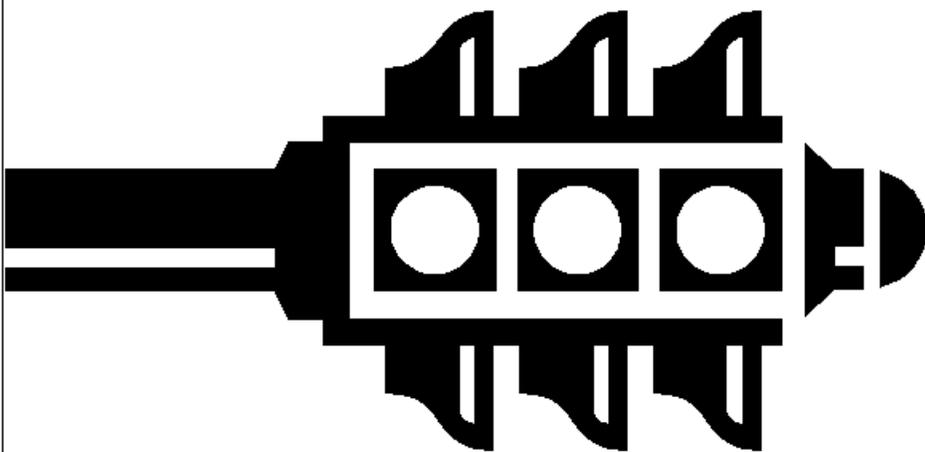
Red-Class Disruption

Yellow-Warning

Green-OK