

# MEP Classroom Management: The Flow of MEP Classes Through the Week

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Picture this:

You scoot your chair back from your desk and grab the bag you carry between classes. It's heavy from all the games and books you need for your lessons. You heave it over your shoulder. As you step out of the office and head to class, your sleepiness burns away. You've already been productive this morning, but the real work is just starting. You open the door to your classroom. 30 pairs of eyes turn to you in unison, and a chorus of "Hi teacher" rings out. Students rush up to you for hugs, to show you a treasured toy, or to help you set up your things. You smile. They're adorable. But adorable and sweet as they are, once the energy of the class starts to slip, it's a wrap. Game Over. Do Not Pass Go. You know it's your job to manage that energy. To gently (maybe) direct your students' childish enthusiasm into learning without letting it devolve into chaos.

The question is— HOW do you do that?

In this post, I'm gonna tell you exactly how I run my MEP class, and why I do things the way I do. Take what you like, and leave the rest.

## Greeting/Attendance

First, I put my things on my desk. When class starts, all the students will stand up, bow, and say "Good morning, Teacher." I always say good morning back and bow to them in an equally formal way to show respect for their culture (at first I really thought this display of respect for elders means that my students would behave well in my class. I was wrong.)

Then I ask a question as a warm up. Usually it's "What did you guys have for breakfast today?" At first the kids were shy, but once they get used to it they're always very excited to share their breakfasts with the class. I give them points for answering to encourage participation. Some students will rattle off a long list of foods that make me a lil jealous. Some will say they didn't eat and I'll ask them how the air tasted. I like to repeat what they share back to them to make sure I got it right, and to show them I was really listening. I start off kind and then devolve into roasting my students as class goes on.

From there I'll call attendance, and note any absences. Later in your office time you'll note of what make-up work absent students need to complete when they come back to school.

## Setting Up

I like to start my class off with a little board set up. (I actually get there early most days to do this before the “Greeting/Attendance” process, but you don’t have to). The students are allowed to chat together, but I ask them to keep it down OR ELSE. They don’t...

I turn to the board. Check that the date is written correctly on the top. If it’s not, I write it in.

**[Note: There is a PAINFULLY specific way the students are trained to write the date, their homework, and notes. You can ask your Thai teacher about this before your first class, or just let the students correct you as you go. Either way, it’s a good idea to look at a student notebook before or during your first week. Maybe get one for yourself to write the class notes in so you can see from their perspective how you need to format them.]**

Second, I write some things on the side of the board closest to my desk:

- A scoreboard with the names of the two class teams
- The Team Leaders and Helpers
- The subjects/page numbers we’ll complete for the day.
- The games for the day

<u>TEAM NAME</u>	<u>TEAM NAME</u>	<u>Lesson</u>
Leader:	Leader:	Attendance
Helper:	Helper:	Notes/HW Check
		Vocabulary/ Vocab Game
		Eng LB pg 1-5 ; WB pg 6-7
		Sci: pg. 25-32
		Math: pg. 15-18
		RUNNING GAME
		DRAWING GAME
		BALL GAME

**[Note: The students won't write the team points or the day's lesson down, so it doesn't matter how you write that, if you even choose to do teams and points in your class.]**

On other side of the board, I write their homework for the day. It looks like this:

<u>Eng</u>	25 Mar 23	<u>Write quiz words 1x</u>
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**[Note: If you choose to assign homework, the students will write it in their homework notebook. If you don't write it just so, they will ask you a million questions. So if you plan on giving homework, it helps to draw out the grid like I have it written, changing out the content as you choose. Notice I underlined the capital letter "E" and "W" in the homework section. I taught my kids that an underlined letter (either for notes or homework) meant it should be capital. That saved me so much time and stress.]**

Let me explain why I set up my board this way:

1. Helps Make Expectations Clear:
  - Kids (and grown folks for that matter) don't do well with ideas or spoken words. They do well with things they can see. Writing the agenda on the board cuts down on questions of "What are we doing next teacher?" And "How long until the next game?" Points offer tangible rewards. Minus-ing points offers tangible repercussions.
2. Time Management:
  - Students can manage their own time and effort better when they can see everything laid out for them. I often say things like "Ya'll just took 10 minutes to open your books. Look at how many things we still have left to do. (I say this calmly, not angrily. As a teacher, I'm also helping them learn time management). If ya'll don't go faster we won't have time for a game." That concept is much easier to relay when you can point to a board with the agenda clearly written on it. I erase items as we complete them. So the students are able to keep up in real time with how much we've done, and how much we have left to do.
3. Classroom Management:
  - There is only one of me, and there are 30 kids (who often act less like kids and more like gremlins fed after midnight). Outsourcing some work and a solid system of punishments and rewards just make sense.
4. Consequences:
  - Normal bad behavior gets called out and minus points. But when they inevitably decide to go absolutely feral, I don't say a word. I pause and calmly walk over to the agenda on the board and erase a letter from one of their games. It doesn't

matter if they don't notice right away. They will eventually. If things keep up, I erase another. This method is effective, simple, and keeps me from yelling. Warning your students "You're gonna lose your game time!" Just doesn't hit as tangibly as erasing letters from the word "GAME". It also gives them clear "fudge around and find out" parameters. Usually by the second or third letter, my ears are graced with sweet, sweet silence.

Finally, if you have it, you can set up your computer and powerpoint. I don't use the computer in class. A computer free class is hard in some ways and easier in others. Since I don't use the computer for classes, I only have one suggestion on that front—make sure you watch YouTube videos all the way through before you put them on in class. You might really think there's no way for this Planet Earth clip or funny kid song to go left. You would be wrong.

Once I have my board set up, I turn back to my class. From there my morning routine looks a little different depending on what day of the week it is.

### Monday Team Names, Leaders, and Helpers

I choose team leaders and team helpers on Mondays for the whole week. The students choose the team names for themselves.

1. Team Leaders (decide Teams Names on Monday and pass out tests on Friday)
2. Team Names (self-explanatory)
3. Team Helpers (write the points on the board during games)

First,

I write the names of the 2 team leaders and 2 team helpers on the board. I like to set up a rotation of students to be helpers and leaders so everyone gets a turn (when I've forgotten to pick someone and double picked someone else, I could tell that the overlooked student, though not skilled enough in English to express the sentiment, was most definitely plotting on my downfall. I neither need nor want the smoke).

Second,

I tell the class they have 5 minutes. Everyone should pitch their ideas to the Team Leader. And then the Team Leader should come up and tell me their Team Name. I set the timer on my phone and hit start. "This is a democracy," I remind them. "So you should hear everyone's ideas." I don't know exactly what kind of playground politics go into these decisions, and I don't need to know. But when I look up I see frowns, furious whispering, and the occasional eraser changing hands. Power plays and bribery—democracy at work. At the end of a cool 5 minutes, I've got my team names. I write them on the board.

Third,

I write the vocabulary on the board. The students copy this into their English Notebook. These are a few words that my students will write every night for homework and be quizzed on at the end of the week.

Fourth,

I start my usual morning routine. We start at this step Tuesday - Thursday since we've already chosen the team name, leader, and helper for the week.

**[Note: Mondays are usually shorter days. The last MEP class period is usually a Club class on Mondays. So you'll have to plan your classwork around Monday being a shorter day for regular class.]**

### Tuesday - Thursday Class Routine

After greetings and warm-up, attendance, and writing on the board, on Mondays the students write the week's vocabulary. Tuesdays - Thursdays we check homework and write notes at the same time.

If you have a computer, it would be easiest to put the day's notes up on a powerpoint slide. If you're like me and don't use a computer in class, you'll have to write the notes on the board (that's why I get to my class a little early every day).

Homework Check/Notes-

I put the notes up on the board for all three subjects at once. The students will write the Math notes in their Math notebook, Science notes in their Science notebooks, and English notes in their English notebooks. Things need to move quickly, so I set my timer for 30 minutes and tell them they better finish homework check and their notes in that time OR ELSE. They won't. My students complain that's not enough time for so many notes, and I tell them they should take the energy they're putting into arguing with me, channel it into their hands, and write faster. Checking 30 notebooks takes enough time to spark chaos and mutiny. While I love a good revolution, I prefer not to be part of the deposed power structure. The notes provide constructive work for those idle gremlin hands. Plus the notes correspond to the subject tests I give them on Fridays. After writing the same notes every day, they should know the answers for the test. Will they know the answers? It could go either way. But I'm employed as a teacher, not a performer of miracles. I call the students up by team. They form a seated line in the front of the room up to my desk. The students still in their seats should be able to see the notes on the board clearly over their heads. I take my red marking crayon and check each word for correct spelling. If they mis-spell more than two words I have them sit back down and fix it (I'm also not a martyr).

Note Check-

I now have to check the notes they wrote while I checked their homework. Sisyphus, that you? Nope, it's me, a teacher. I have the students bring me their notebooks (opened to the correct page. This detail will save you so much time) and stack them

(opened) on my desk. I make a face that's part horror and part defeat at the literal mountain of work in front of me. I call the team leaders and helpers up and ask them to break up the mountain of notebooks and transfer them (OPENED) to my desk in the teacher's office. I like to check notebooks in my office time. I make my scary teacher face and tell them they better stack the notebooks NEATLY. The team leaders and helpers fight for the privilege of helping me, shoving each other to get the biggest stack of books, and I feel a little better about my situation in life.

#### Games-

If there is time left in the first part of my MEP class it's not gonna be a lot. So a good way to use this time is to play a game. Since there isn't much time left, hangman is my top choice. The rowdier games can be for the second part of class. However, I try to look like I run a democratic classroom. So if a bunch of the kids start booing me and yelling "NOOO teacher," I usually give in and let them vote on the game. I'm honestly so gracious....

My phone alarm rings when I have five minutes left, and that's a perfect amount of time to pack up and say goodbye to the students. Any awkward, extra minutes can be spent adding up the points for each team. With both terrible math skills and a love of outsourcing, I like to call up the best mathematicians from each team and let them add the points while I pack my bags in peace. Sometimes their calculations are off, but that's the price you pay for having kids do your work for you. It's worth it. I erase the points and write each team's total (and probably incorrect) score. I leave the scoreboard up for the next MEP class later in the day. My phone alarm rings again, letting me know it's time to finish class. My students stand again, bow, and say "Thank you, Teacher." I bow back, and thank them too. Cause they did pretty good, I guess. For kids.

**[At this point it's probably time for your 30 minute morning break. I'll write another post about places to go for snacks or just to stretch your legs. I'll also do another post specifically about games.]**

When I come back to MEP class, I have one hour left with them. Now this might be different for you, and you might have only had one hour with them in the morning. In that case, you'll have two hours with them later. It doesn't really matter, we all have 3 hours with our MEP kids total every day, so you can just pick up and leave off where you need to. The kids will stand again when you re-enter class. They'll bow and say "Good morning/afternoon, Teacher!" I always bow back and greet them, too. I put my things on my desk. I might rewrite the scoreboard and final items on the agenda if I erased it. And then we get back to it.

#### Book Work-

During the last hour or so of class, we read and complete the book pages we need to get through for the day. I try to make book learning itself into a game, and it's not even for the kids' sake. I just hate being bored, and book learning can be boring. Now one

thing about kids: they are professional time wasters. Which I respect, but I also have learning goals to meet. Left to their own devices they will take 15 minutes to open their books to the correct page. However, if you turn transitions into a game and shout “FIRST TEAM WHO OPENS THEIR BOOK WINS 1,000 POINTS” – suddenlyyy they have some pep in their step, suddenlyyy they’re altruistic at heart and helping the teammate who’s always in lalaland flip to the right page. But be warned, vicious fights will spark if you say the wrong team won. If you truly aren’t sure, your best bet is rock paper scissors. No one argues with rock paper scissors. Rock paper scissors is the great equalizer. I also remind my students that if we don’t finish our work, we can’t play our games. A reminder that feels like a personal attack to myself, because I also love class game time. To make the actual process of reading fun, we do popcorn reading. One thing about reading- it’s really important to correct their pronunciation till it sounds mostly right. Practicing how to make the “L” and “R” sounds is hugely important for them. On book pages where we’re answering questions, I call on random students and write the correct answers on the board for everyone to copy. If you have a powerpoint, you’ll include the book answers in your powerpoint. Students who answer correctly get points for their team. I don’t take away points if students get answers wrong though. I’m telling you, I’m truly benevolent...

After book work comes games (if we have time and everybody decided to act right). Usually when we’re having the absolute most fun humanly possibly, my alarm rings to let me know there’s ten minutes left of class. I find the most natural stopping point, and crush the hopes and dreams of every child who didn’t get to play a game today. I tally up the points for the grand total, and declare the winning team. All the winning team members line up and get a sticker. I pack up my bags, and again, my leaders and helpers push and shove each other to help me. I remind them they can keep that energy with their classmates, but they better not break my stuff. They nod, and bring my things to my office desk. My phone rings an alarm letting me know class is over. My students bow again and say “Thank you, Teacher!” Even if they’re mad at me and don’t mean it. I bow back and wave goodbye. I love my little mutinous gremlins. We have so much fun in class, and I laugh real belly laughs. They better not have messed up my desk though...

### Friday Test Day

#### Tests-

On Fridays we do all the normal stuff we do every other day (except the students won’t have any homework over the weekend, so you won’t write any homework on the board). But once we finish checking Thursday’s vocabulary homework, there are no more notes and there’s no more book work. All we do is review and test. The schedule typically goes like this:

Vocab Review Game- Hangman  
Vocab Test

English Review Game- Running Game  
English Test

Math Review Game- Bell Game  
Math Test

Science Review Game- Drawing Game  
Science Test

After each game, I call the team leaders up and give them one test to pass out. For each test, we set a 30 minute timer. When the timer goes off, I call up the students by number (this makes writing their scores in your grade sheet easier) and take up their tests. Then we play another game and repeat the process. If a test takes too long, we lose game time. Once all the tests are done, the winning team lines up and gets their stickers.

The most important event of Friday for my class is when the team leaders and helpers get to reach in the easer box and choose a super cool eraser for doing a good percentage of my work for me that week.

For the last time, the leaders and helpers push and shove to grab my things and help me bring them to the teacher's office. It makes me feel like a diva/powerful social figure so I smile. The class bows and I bow back. I wish them all a good weekend.

And that's a week at Thida.