

# What Is Your Level of Classroom "Withitness?"



by Julia G. Thompson

for us all. As amazing and inspiring as it may be, however, no one is actually born with the trait of "withitness."

What is withitness? At all times a teacher knows what's going on in class.

Teachers with withitness are said to have eyes in the back of their heads. But, since they never turn their backs on the class, this is not really necessary.

Here are some simple tips for cultivating your own classroom withitness:

1. Don't ever turn your back on a class.
2. Be alert to signs and signals among your students
3. Be prepared so that you can focus on students instead of the lesson.
4. Develop your personal multitasking skills.
5. Stay on your feet and monitor.
6. Arrange your class so that you can see and be seen.
7. Don't distract students when they are working.
8. Pace lessons so that they flow in a businesslike manner.
9. Quietly correct off task behavior and then move on.

Here's a quick excerpt from the handouts that accompany the professional development DVD. Use it to determine just how you rate as a teacher who knows what is going on in class?

***TEACHER SELF-ASSESSMENT 5.7: WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF WITHITNESS?***

Use the list of strategies below to assess your level of withitness.

**Rank yourself on a scale of 1-3 with 3 being as successful as possible. Any strategy that you can't rank yourself as a 3 should be one that you continue to work to improve.**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't turn your back on a class.**
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Be alert to signs and signals among your students.**
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Know your students well.**
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Greet students at the door at the start of class to scan for potential problems.**
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_ Be prepared so that you can focus on students instead of the lesson.**
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_ Develop your personal multitasking skills.**
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_ Stay on your feet and monitor.**
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_ Arrange your class so that you can see and be seen.**
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_ Don't distract students when they are working.**
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_ Pace lessons so that they flow in a businesslike manner.**
- 11. \_\_\_\_\_ Quietly correct off task behavior and then move on.**

**At this point in the school year, I always wonder if I am an effective teacher when it comes to classroom management. Even though I have written pages and pages about it, I still worry that my own classroom is not as well-managed as it should be and could be. Like other teachers, I want to make sure that every student becomes a self-disciplined success story. With that lofty goal in mind, I spend time each year when a grading period ends to review my efforts at making sure that my classroom management procedures and policies are as effective as I would like for them to be.**

**With that in mind, you may also want to take a mid-year moment to examine your own classroom management effectiveness. While there are many different approaches to solve discipline problems, some are simply more effective than others. As you take this quiz, ask yourself which of the answer choices would be the most effective way to handle a problem that you and your students may be experiencing.**

**1. Students take too long to get their materials arranged for a test.**

- a. Remind them to hurry.**
- b. Start the test and let the slow ones catch up.**
- c. Tell them they can have one minute to get ready and then time them by pointedly watching the clock.**

**2. A student is lost in a daydream instead of finishing a reading assignment.**

- a. Tell the student that if he or she doesn't get to work, there will be more to do for homework.**
- b. Stay at your desk and wait to see how long it takes the dreamer to get back to work.**
- c. Move to stand near the student.**

**3. Students jokingly insult each other while waiting for class to begin.**

- a. Ignore the horseplay. Class hasn't started yet.**
- b. Remind students of the procedure for starting class and the class rule about showing respect for others.**
- c. Tell students to stop and to get to work at once.**

**4. A student always finishes assignments in a rush and then wants to spend the rest of class doing absolutely nothing.**

- a. As long as no one else is being bothered, there is no real problem.**
- b. Design instruction so that one assignment will flow into the next. Students can use a checklist to keep on track.**
- c. Give the student more work to do.**

**5. A few students show up day after day without completed homework assignments.**

- a. Tell them that they are going to fail the class and that you are going to call home.**
- b. Ask them to write out the reason and then work with them to figure out a solution. Take a positive approach.**
- c. Stop giving homework assignments. Focus on class time learning instead.**

**6. Students ball up papers and toss them at the wastebasket while you are giving directions about an assignment.**

- a. Shake your head, frown, and move near them.**
- b. Stop what you are saying and reprimand them.**
- c. Finish your directions. Go to the students and quietly ask them about the class rule they violated.**

**7. A student is constantly disorganized. A book bag full of crumpled papers functions as a locker.**

- a. Keep the student after class and straighten out the mess together. Work out a weekly organization goal.**
- b. Call home and talk to a parent about helping the student get organized.**
- c. Assign binder buddies to help the student find materials.**

**8. Students chat while you are explaining the homework assignment.**

- a. Ignore it.**
- b. Stop and wait for them to pay attention. Call them to order if needed.**
- c. Tell them to stop talking and start paying attention.**

**9. A student lacks a textbook, pen, or paper.**

- a. Share materials from the class storehouse.**
- b. Don't allow student to complete the work in class. He or she can do it at home. This will help all students remember to bring materials next time.**
- c. Allow student to borrow from classmates.**

**10. Students talk back rudely when you have reprimanded them.**

- a. Send them to the office.
- b. Reprimand them privately.
- c. Ignore it.

**11. Students turn in sloppy or inaccurate work.**

- a. Refuse to take it.
- b. Take it but give a lecture about work habits.
- c. Require that they redo the work whenever practical.

**12. Students are tardy to class without a good reason.**

- a. Enforce your rules regarding tardiness to class.
- b. Refuse to let them in.
- c. Meet them at the door and ask why they are tardy.

**13. Some students ignore you when you call for the class to quiet down to work.**

- a. Keep asking until they listen to you.
- b. Raise your voice until no one can ignore you.
- c. Give the signal that they recognize as a sign that they need to get quiet.

**14. A student seems to take forever to dawdle over any assignment in class—tests, quizzes, and other written work.**

- a. Give the student a timer to self-manage tasks.
- b. Call home to find out any reasons for the problem.
- c. Talk to the student to find out the reasons for the slow pace and to find ways to help the student stay focused and productive.

**15. One student refuses to work with the rest of the students in a group.**

- a. Make sure that everyone knows the reason for the assignment, has an appropriate role in the group, and has been taught teamwork skills.
- b. Ignore the situation as long as you can so that students can work it out for themselves.
- c. Take care to assign students to groups where they will be able to work with friends

**Answers:**

1. c 6. a 11. c

2. c 7. a 12. a

3. b 8. b 13. c

4. b 9. a 14. c

5. b 10. b 15. a

***About Julia Thompson***



***As a workshop leader and writer, best-selling author Julia Thompson has taught thousands of teachers how to create student-centred classrooms, thrive during that important first year of teaching, motivate reluctant learners, prevent discipline problems, and sustain high expectations for the success of their students as well as for***

***themselves.***

***A practicing classroom teacher, Julia is the author of several resources for teachers. In each of her books, she presents classroom-tested ideas, activities, and strategies designed to make each school day a successful one. Because she is a full-time teacher herself, Julia focuses her advice on the practical aspects of a teacher's busy professional life. She understands***

***first-hand the realities of today's classroom. This extensive experience and the insights she has gained as a teacher trainer have shaped her beliefs about the daily challenges that can confront even the most steadfast teachers.***

***Julia's dedication to promoting excellence among her colleagues and to helping new teachers translate their dreams into successful practice is the focus of her work as an author of professional development resources and as a teacher trainer.***

***Books written by Julia and available to order from Amazon:***

