

# **EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION**









## Pocketbook

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Cartoons:  
Phil Hailstone



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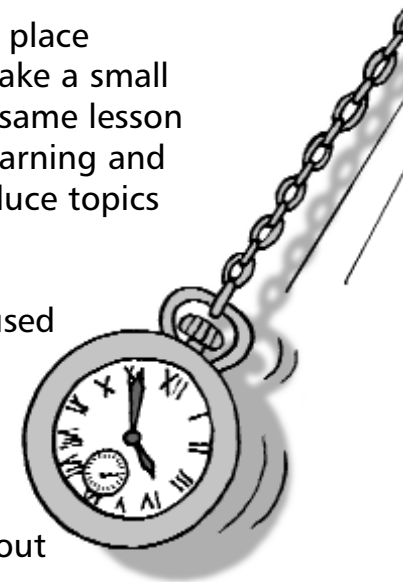
# Influential language in the classroom



Improving your communication skills in the classroom is about putting in place small changes that make a big difference rather than big changes that make a small one. Frequently, the only difference between two teachers delivering the same lesson in the same way, one of which gets positive compliance and successful learning and one which doesn't, is the way they use language to explain things, introduce topics and encourage learning and behaviour.

Many of the influential language patterns introduced in this section are used successfully in hypnosis and therapy. Adopting them will help you to:

- Start lessons more effectively, ensuring that what you say is aligned with the way you want things to be done
- Increase the likelihood of your behavioural instructions being carried out
- Be more motivating in the way that you talk about learning
- Ensure that you say what you mean and avoid suggesting the opposite, or leaving the possibility for behaviours and actions that you would rather not have
- Spot students' use of negative language and redirect (or reframe) their thinking



# Hidden meanings – presuppositions



Have you ever asked a pupil to do something and then found that they did something different? This can happen even if you think that you have been really clear about what you wanted. Every time we say something we communicate on two levels. There is a surface meaning and also a hidden meaning (or presupposition). It is the hidden meanings that children frequently respond to:

- If I say: '**When** you have learnt this you **will** be able to carry out your own project', then I am suggesting success
- Notice how different the effect of the following could be: '**If** you are able to do this then you **might** be able to do your own project'

The use of 'when' and 'will' in the first example sets a positive frame of thinking, whereas the language in the second example suggests a possible negative outcome as well as the possibility of success, leaving the learner with a choice of mindset.

Check that what you are saying not only does the job on the surface, but also that the hidden meaning reinforces your message. You can use suggestion and hidden meaning to support motivation, behaviour and learning.

# Double binds



One type of hidden meaning, the **double bind**, uses the offer of choice to influence behaviour and response. People like to be able to choose and children and teenagers are no different. With double binds, however, either choice results in the outcome you want:

- *'Sara, would you like to start by drawing the map or do the questions first?'*
- *'You can work and discuss this in a pair or as a whole table.'*
- *'Reading the example, you might find yourself thinking about what you already know or you may find yourself making new connections.'*
- *'Only do as much revision as you want to in order to get better.'*

Think of double binds as a way of giving choice about 'how' to do something that is not an option.



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# Don't think of a pink flamingo



What happens when you try not to think of something? For instance, don't think of a pink flamingo... .. No matter how hard you try, you cannot not think of it!

In the classroom it's easy to start talking about what we don't want rather than what we do. Because working memory and conscious awareness is limited and only holds five to nine pieces of information (seven plus or minus two) at any time, it is better to make good use of the limited space in your learners' conscious awareness by telling them what you *do* want rather than what you don't.



# Don't think about your rules!



Take a moment to think about some typical classroom rules. How could you reframe the language in the left hand column to point to the behaviours that the teacher might want to see rather than mentioning the ones that they don't?

Rule	How could what is wanted be said more effectively?
Don't run	Walk in the corridors
Don't talk loudly in this activity	
Don't be rude	
Don't fight	

Rather than talk about what you don't want, have a constant schedule of positive reinforcement in which you mention frequently and clearly what you do want.

Take a moment to reflect on your own practice. What will you change?

# Using negatives to get what you want



On the other hand, you can use the effect of 'don't' and other negatives deliberately to make subtle suggestions. For example:

'I **don't** know whether you will find this interesting.'

'I'm **not** sure when you will realise how important this is.'

Constructions like these arouse curiosity. They tempt with a subtle challenge and the promise of something intriguing.





## Yes tags



Another influential language pattern is the **yes tag**. Disagreeing involves slightly more mental effort than agreeing. Yes tags, or tag questions, make use of this fact by adding a negative question at the end of something that has been suggested in order to increase compliance and the likelihood of agreement.

Examples of yes tags:

- *'You can, **can't** you?'*
- *'That's right, **isn't** it?'*
- *'And when you have got to the end you will know what this means, **won't** you?'*
- *'You will tell me when this happens again, **won't** you?'*
- *'Now that you have finished the questions sheet, you could begin to make some revision notes, **couldn't** you?'*

Now you know about these, you can make use of them yourself, can't you? Nodding while you say a yes tag increases its effectiveness.

# Yes sets

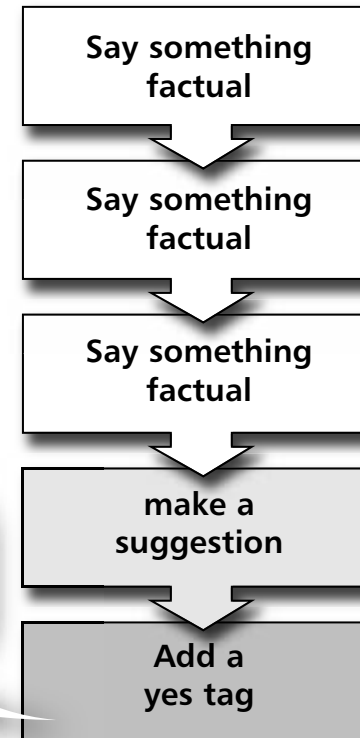


It has long been known in psychology that if you first get someone to agree to something small it is easier then to ask for something else. The effectiveness of this increases if you have a *series* of 'small asks' first. In the classroom you can make use of this tendency by using a yes set language pattern. **Yes sets** are frequently used in hypnosis and often feature in the speeches of charismatic leaders.

First say three things that are completely true (things that internally your pupils' minds will automatically say yes to), then make your suggestion:

*'It is 3.00 pm, we have done the questions and we have looked at the map. Now would be a good time to do some quiet mind mapping for revision, wouldn't it?'*

(Notice the **yes tag** at the end of the sentence. It is quite hard to say no to in this sort of context.)



## About the author

### Richard Churches



Richard is one of the leading writers, trainers and speakers on communication skills, coaching and influencing skills for teachers in the UK. He was an Advanced Skills Teacher in a challenging inner city school before becoming Principal Consultant for National Programmes at CfBT Education Trust, the world's leading education consultancy. Richard was a senior manager in two inner London schools, an Ofsted inspector and teacher of secondary and primary age children in a 15 year teaching career which included working in schools on special measures, an international school, a top UK grammar school and a special school (MLD).

Richard has been lead national consultant on several government programmes for the Department for Children Schools and Families and the National College for School Leadership and has worked in a wide range of countries as a teacher, trainer and consultant including: Italy, The Netherlands, Ireland, Oman, Pakistan, India, UAE and Qatar. He co-wrote with Roger Terry: *NLP for Teachers: how to be a highly effective teacher* and *The NLP Toolkit: activities and strategies for teachers, trainers and school leaders*.

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