

How to Increase Student Compliance with Educator Requests

Students who are non-compliant or defiant can disrupt classroom instruction. Here are a series of steps that educators can follow that increase the odds that a student will cooperate (Dhaem 2012; Matheson et al., 2005; Walker, 1997).

1. **Preparation: Identify and eliminate triggers.** Student non-compliance can be triggered by events or conditions in the classroom. Whenever you are able to identify predictable triggers to problem behavior, take steps to eliminate them.

For example, a student is “triggered” to confrontational and uncooperative behavior when directed to read aloud in front of peers. The educator reworks the reading activity so that the student no longer has to engage in public reading, preventing the confrontational behavior from being triggered.

2. **Preparation: Set up appropriate consequences for non-compliance.** For students who you verify can do the task requested but have a pattern of choosing not to comply, collaborate with the teacher in advance to select one or more appropriate consequences for non-compliance. Possible consequences for an episode of non-compliance might be loss of 5 minutes of free time, mandatory after-class TA or teacher conference while other students go to lunch, or parent phone call.

Communicate to the student that compliance with educator requests is important and let him or her know up front what the selected consequences are for non-compliance.

3. **Deliver request: Adopt a professional, positive manner.** Educators are more likely to gain compliance when they approach the student in a positive manner.

Make eye contact with the student. Address the student in a calm, neutral or positive tone of voice. Use simple clear language. State directives one at a time. (Include one verb per directive, such as “*John, open your book to page 23.*”) When possible, state what the student should do (positive behavior), instead of what the student should stop doing. For example, “*John, please return to your seat*” is a stronger statement than “*John, please stop walking around the room.*”

Allow sufficient wait-time for the student to comply (e.g., 30 seconds). Provide brief praise if the student complies.

4. **Deliver request: Repeat, repeat, repeat.** If the student fails to comply to your first stating of the request, remain calm and restate your request several times. After each repetition, allow a short wait-time for compliance. (One expert—Dhaem, 2012) calls this the ‘broken record’ approach.) While restating, continue to focus on the current request. Do not bring up other issues, such as student attitude or past misbehavior. These can only sidetrack you and might trigger a negative student reaction.

Provide brief praise if the student complies.

5. **Deliver request: Use a 2-part choice statement.** If the student still fails to comply, restate your request a final time as a 2-part choice statement.

- First, present the negative, or non-compliant, choice and its consequence (e.g., "Angela, you can choose for me to call your parent to tell her that you won't work on today's assignment. ^").
- Next, you state the positive behavioral choice that the student is encouraged to select (e.g., "Or you can finish your work now, Angela, and avoid the phone call home. It's your choice. ^").

Allow sufficient wait-time for the student to comply (e.g., 30 seconds). Provide brief praise if the student complies.

If the student fails to comply, you impose the negative consequence selected in advance (Step 2).

Additional Considerations. Throughout your interaction with the student, remember to keep your tone neutral or positive. Once the consequence is delivered, do not continue to 'nag' the student.

Also, you should not impose a negative consequence if you judge that the student is for whatever reason **unable** to comply. Instead provide support to the student (e.g., offering academic assistance) to overcome the obstacle to learning

References

Dhaem, J. (2012). Responding to minor misbehavior through verbal and nonverbal responses. *Beyond Behavior, 21*(3), 29-34.

Matheson, A. S., & Shriver, M. D. (2005). Training teachers to give effective commands: Effects on student compliance and academic behaviors. *School Psychology Review, 34*, 202-219.

Walker, H.M. (1997). *The acting-out child: Coping with classroom disruption*. Longmont, CO: SoprisWest.