

# Tips and Tricks for Outdoor Classroom Management

The following tips for classroom management come from Boston public school teachers experienced in using the schoolyard as a resource for teaching. Use these tips to help you get started taking students outdoors.



## DEVELOP OUTDOOR CLASSROOM ROUTINES

**Develop outdoor classroom rules** to post in the classroom. (No running. Quiet voices. Touch gently.)

### **Establish set procedures for going outdoors.**

Practice collecting clipboards and other tools, lining up, and walking through the halls so students know what is expected and can get ready quickly and quietly.

### **Use a different door than students use at recess.**

Using a different door can reinforce the fact that this is class time and help students remember to exhibit the behavior of scientists, writers, artists, or researchers.

### **Have an outdoor “gathering spot.”**

Designate a gathering area where students go when they first get outside to await initial instructions, and to which they return for a mid-lesson check-in or closing discussion.

### **Have a signal for emergency situations.**

Practice it so students know how to return to the building immediately, if needed.

## BE PREPARED

### **Have a clear objective for going outdoors.**

Being clear about the purpose of going outdoors will help you direct students' attention to what you want them to observe or experience in their time outdoors, and will help students connect what they see and do outdoors to what they are learning in class.

### **Have a backup lesson plan.**

The first several times out students will be learning how to work outdoors and the work they are doing may be secondary. Have an alternative lesson planned in case outdoor classroom rules aren't followed and you have to go back in.

### **Anticipate the weather.**

Going outdoors is useful in all types of weather though you will likely spend less time outdoors if it is cold or rainy. Let students know you will be going out the day before and ask them to bring appropriate clothing. As they become used to working outdoors they are increasingly motivated to come prepared. Some schools keep a box of donated gloves, hats and jackets on hand.

## BUILD SUCCESS

### **Help student get to know their schoolyard.**

Use the first couple of times out to let students explore their schoolyard. Take a walk around the site and talk with them about what you find. Find out what questions they have about the things they see. Map the schoolyard and/or give names to the areas they find ("the big rock"; "the forest"). Point out any noxious plants (poison ivy, stinging nettle) that they will need to be able to identify. Let students poke around, freely explore and play with the natural outdoor materials before getting down to work.

### **Keep it short.**

Begin with short trips out and increase the time spent outside as students' skills and stamina increase. An outdoor experience may be only ten or twenty minutes, just long enough to make notes in a writer's notebook, or to collect data; later in the year your time outdoors may be longer, but it does not need to be.

### **Always give students something to carry.**

Clipboards, notebooks, measuring instruments, or other tools help students take their task seriously.

### **Go out often.**

The more you go out, the easier it gets. Students' ability to work purposefully outdoors increases as they learn what to expect, experience the comfort of a routine, and develop confidence in their own outdoor observation skills.

### **Model outdoor skills.**

Model what you want students to do before setting them loose to work. Show them how to turn over a stone gently and replace it; how to examine a plant; how to sit quietly and write; how to observe without being heard. They will learn a lot about how to look closely and take notes by watching you do it alongside them.

### **Remember that learning looks different outdoors.**

Voices may be louder, and body movements larger outdoors. Excitement is likely to be high, and expressed more physically than in the classroom. Students may move around to share what they found with others. Encourage them to talk to each other about what they find.

### **Believe in your students.**

All students from the highest achieving to the most challenged can work outdoors. Resist the temptation to use outdoor work as a reward for good behavior. Communicate a belief that working outdoors is simply part of everyday class work. Your students may well surprise you.