

## Techniques for Getting Students to Quiet Down and Listen

In this *Edutopia* article, Todd Finley mentions a few of the standard quiet-down techniques – the “whisper bell” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvo2BbQDsqq>, raising two fingers, saying “Attention, class,” and Harry Wong’s “Give me 5” (Focus eyes on the speaker, Be quiet, Be still, Empty your hands, Listen). He also mentions a technique he once used to silence a group of 36 out-of-control sophomores: he clutched his chest and dropped to his knees like Sergeant Elias at the end of *Platoon*. “Instantly, dead silence and open mouths replaced classroom Armageddon,” says Finley. “Standing up like nothing had happened, I said, ‘Thanks for your attention – let’s talk about love poems.’ I never used that stunt again. After all, should a real emergency occur, it would be better if students call 911 rather than post my motionless body on YouTube. I’ve thought this through.”

Finley then shares some other possible quiet-down techniques suitable for different grade levels. It’s important to introduce your chosen technique and practice with students until they can get to 100 percent silence. (Click on the article link below to access videos on several of these.)

### Kindergarten and lower elementary:

- Making a novel sound like a rain stick or wind chime;
- Popping a marshmallow into your mouth, puff out your cheeks, and have students puff out theirs.
- Blowing “hush bubbles” from a Windex bottle filled with bubble mix.
- Placing Quiet Critters on each student’s desk and moving too-noisy students’ critters close to the edge of their desk, which means no talking or the critter gets taken away. Students who have their critter at the end of the activity have their name added to a reward chart.
- Various commercial products like Traffic Light (ICT Magic), Super Sound Box, Class Dojo, and Too Noisy App.

### Upper elementary and middle school:

- Saying “Silent 20” at the end of an activity; if students return to their seats and are completely quiet in 20 seconds, the group advances one space on a giant facsimile of Game of Life, and when they reach the last square (which takes about a month), the class has a popcorn party.
- Talking to students as they enter the room and using informal chit-chat to socialize them to class expectations.
- Using Doug Lemov’s “100 percent attention” hand gestures and countdowns.
- Having a content word of the week – perhaps *integer*, *renaissance*, or *circuit* – that signals that it’s time for silence.

### High school:

- Playing classical music (Bach, not Mahler) at low volume as students enter the room sets a professional tone.

- Write on the board, “If you wish to continue talking during my lesson, I will have to take time off you at break. By the time I’ve written the title on the board you need to be sitting in silence. Anyone who is still talking after that will be kept behind for five minutes.”

This is effective because it gives students adequate warning to comply.

Call and response (the first few are for elementary and middle, the others for high school):

- Teacher says: *Holy...* Students respond: *Macaroni.*
- Teacher says: *1,2,3, eyes on me...* Students respond: *1,2, eyes on you.*
- Teacher says: *I’m incredible...* Students respond: *Like the Hulk. Grrrrr (and flex).*
- Teacher says: *Ayyyyyyyyyyyyyy...* Students respond: *Macarena.*
- Teacher says: *I get knocked down...* Students respond: *But I get up again, you’re never going to keep me down.*
- Teacher says: *Oh, Mickey, you’re so fine...* Students respond: *You’re so fine, you blow my mind – hey, Mickey.*
- Teacher says: *The only easy day...* Students respond: *Was yesterday.* (A Navy SEAL slogan)

“30 Techniques to Quiet a Noisy Class” by Todd Finley in *Edutopia*, October 21, 2014,