

# 5 Teacher Mistakes That Make Students Hate Learning ... and

**5 Shockingly Simple Fixes That Make Achievement Soar**



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Some students love school, and others seem to hate learning. What creates this difference, and how can educators impact it? The education team at Times 10 Publications partners with experienced teachers and school leaders on the front lines of contemporary education. Here's what they've identified as the top five mistakes teachers make that inhibit learning, and the *five shockingly simple fixes* that help kids enjoy class so their learning can soar.

## MISTAKE #1 – IGNORING STUDENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS

One of our experts says that for many years, he spent the beginning of class waiting for students to enter the room and take their seats as he organized papers, changed slides on his whiteboard, or just sat sipping coffee. Transitioning from one class to the next can be chaotic, and it's easy to use pass time to prepare or just take a breath.

The mistake here is that we miss a critical opportunity to engage our learners. Students arrive in varying moods. Some may bring emotional baggage from home, from their prior class, or even from the school's busy corridors. This baggage can interfere with learning, and you have a few crucial seconds to impact change.

## SHOCKINGLY SIMPLE FIX – GREET EVERY STUDENT AT THE DOOR

Sure, you've likely heard this from a principal or read it in a blog post, and you may have taken it with a grain of salt. One of our experts says he ignored this strategy for years.

Not surprisingly, he didn't have a good rapport with his students, and many disdained classwork and failed his class.



One year, he chose to rebuild himself and try a new approach. “I decided I’d stand at the door and greet every single student and say every single name,” he says. “If I noticed a frown, an argument, or even a head down, I’d call attention to it and ask how I could help. I’d smile, laugh, hum, or sing. The impact was palpable.”

The first time you talk to every single student upon their arrival, it may seem odd; you may see some furrowed eyebrows. Over time, though, students will pick up their heads, say hello to you, and many will even smile.

Starting class with a smile is a huge step toward engagement and higher achievement. Plenty of research supports the idea that **kids who have a good rapport with their teachers work harder than those who do not.**

## MISTAKE #2 – APPEARING DISINTERESTED, IMPATIENT, OR FRUSTRATED

Students have high expectations of their teachers. They expect teachers to be “on” at all times. You have to stand tall, speak up, understand, move constantly, have all the answers, and make everyone feel important.

When you ignore a student’s question; say, “I’ll get to you in a minute”; snap at the student who keeps calling your name; or yell at the class when they are confused or distracted, many will hold it against you. They will tune out, think you don’t care, and shut down. Learning will stop. It will be your fault, and you may not even realize your mistake.

## SHOCKINGLY SIMPLE FIX – NEVER LOSE YOUR COOL

It’s challenging, but with practice, you can appear to be the most patient, caring, cool-as-a-cucumber educator your students have ever seen. Take cues from our self-care experts. They offer two simple strategies to enhance focus: *Breathe* and *Exercise*.



“That’s it?” you ask. “This is the simple fix?”

Yes. And it is shockingly simple.

Imagine that moment in class when you’ve had enough. You’re fed up, on edge, and ready to snap. Just thinking about it likely makes your blood boil. Now, take a long, deep, cleansing breath. Hold it for a four-count. Exhale slowly. Push out your emotional baggage and focus only on your breathing. Try this a few times, now and in that moment in class.

Next, if you’re sitting, get up and move, whether you’re at home or reading this from your desk at school. Get on your feet and take some steps. Walk laps around your desk or your living room, even if it feels silly. Now, combine the steps with more cleansing, calming breaths. Feel the impatience, frustration, and anger drift away.



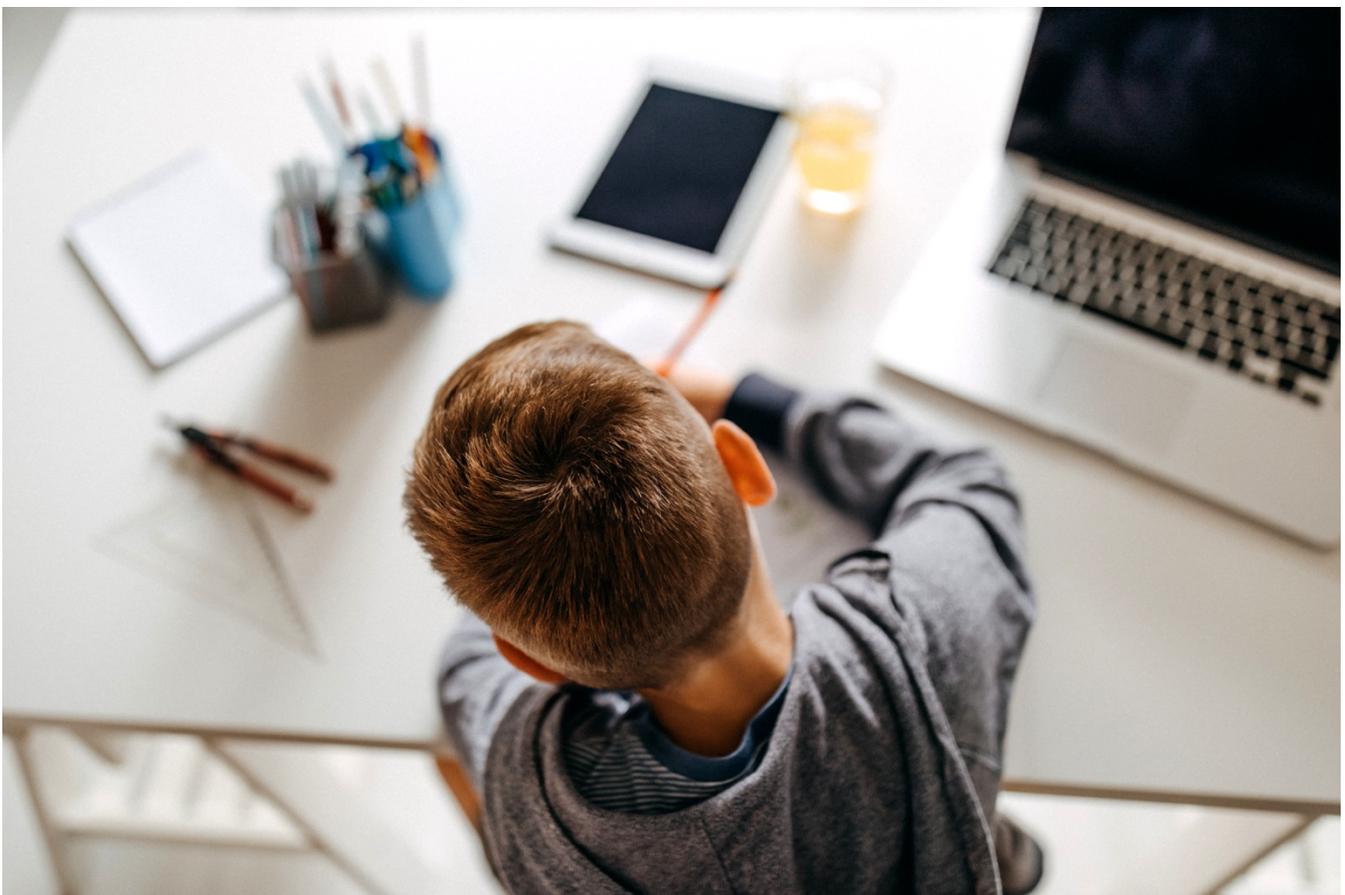
Carry this activity with you to school and try it before students arrive and during class. If they notice and ask about it, invite them to join you. Some districts have gone to school-

wide morning meditation, only to see discipline referrals decline. It's shockingly simple and surprisingly powerful.

Try this fix tomorrow; we promise you'll love it. Best of all, when students see the calm, patient, attentive you, they are more likely to be calm and attentive too.

## MISTAKE #3 – OBSESSING OVER ARCHAIC METHODS

Education is rife with debate about pedagogy: what's right and what's wrong? Traditional-minded teachers spend countless hours worrying about homework, grading, projects, worksheets, tests, lectures, and many other one-room-schoolhouse methods—most of which should have gone the way of the dinosaur.



The point here is not to debate what works and what doesn't. Rather, we mean to underscore how methods impact students, **especially when the academics obscure physical and emotional function.**

Remember that emotional baggage we mentioned earlier? That smile and greeting you offered at the door only lasts so long. When you lose sight of your students' emotional side while hammering them with twenty-five homework problems or your favorite "pop" quiz, you risk losing many kids and making them hate learning.

## SHOCKINGLY SIMPLE FIX – THROW OUT AT LEAST ONE TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHOD

You likely employ at least one practice that students hate—nightly homework, long lectures, demanding notetaking, pop quizzes, weekly tests, participation points, or something else that Laura Ingalls used during her teaching years in Walnut Grove.

What if you pick even one of these and eliminate it—even if it's just for one week, unit, or assignment? Remember, the goal is to inspire joy in learning and see achievement soar. This can be shockingly simple.



Just walk into class tomorrow and announce something like, “The pop quiz is canceled,” or “There will be NO HOMEWORK this week,” or “I’m not talking today; instead, I want you to drive learning with your own discussion,” or one of our faves, “I’m not grading this assignment (or project).”

What’s this look like? We have a book or blog post about it at [10Publications.com](https://10Publications.com). Search for the practice you decide to eliminate and find some strategies. You’ll free up time to focus on your students. They’ll love you for it, and their effort will skyrocket.

## MISTAKE #4 – FAILING TO BE VULNERABLE WITH STUDENTS

An educator shared a story with us about a student we’ll call Jeremy. After reading in class, a student in each group was responsible for returning books to the shelves. One day, a student in Jeremy’s class jokingly said, “We can’t count on Jeremy, he always forgets.” A shy kid, Jeremy flashed a sheepish grin and admitted he did forget once or twice.



A week later, it was time to put books away, and the teacher called on Jeremy's group to stop reading and reshelve the books. "Just don't count on Jeremy to do it," he deadpanned, and the whole class roared in laughter. Everyone except Jeremy.

After school that day, Jeremy returned with his angry parents, who berated the teacher for embarrassing their son. The educator became defensive and ordered them to make an appointment to talk this over. The problem was left unresolved.

## SHOCKINGLY SIMPLE FIX – EMBRACE VULNERABILITY AND APOLOGIZE

"The worst thing of all," the teacher told us, "I never apologized to Jeremy, and our relationship was forever tarnished. It never occurred to me back then that it was okay to admit I made a mistake and to tell the student and his peers that I was sorry."

Jeremy's teacher went on to be an inspiring teacher and was respected by his colleagues and students. Some students, though, will forever see him as a sarcastic, arrogant jerk, and they likely won't remember anything he taught them.

"The key to my later success," he explained, "was learning to be vulnerable in front of my colleagues and, especially, in front of my students. When something went wrong in class, I'd say, 'Hey guys, I really screwed this one up; I need to try again.'

"And when I hurt a student's feelings, which I certainly did at times, I'd tell that kid and her peers, 'I should not have reacted that way. I was angry and took it out on you. I'm deeply sorry.'

"Being vulnerable with kids is not only right, it's the bedrock of rapport-building, which is crucial to successful teaching and leading."

Teachers and school leaders often feel the need to appear perfect and to control everything in their spaces.



Sarcasm and meanness, though, erode relationships and, often, make kids hate learning. **Being vulnerable builds bridges** that will lead to an environment where achievement can soar.

## MISTAKE #5 – NOT ALLOWING RETAKES AND DO-OVERS, OR GRADING THEM DOWN

Forgive us if this sounds obvious, but a teacher's job is to inspire lifelong learning. The moment your students believe learning is finished, they'll shut down. Sadly, a broken education system teaches educators to discourage learning.

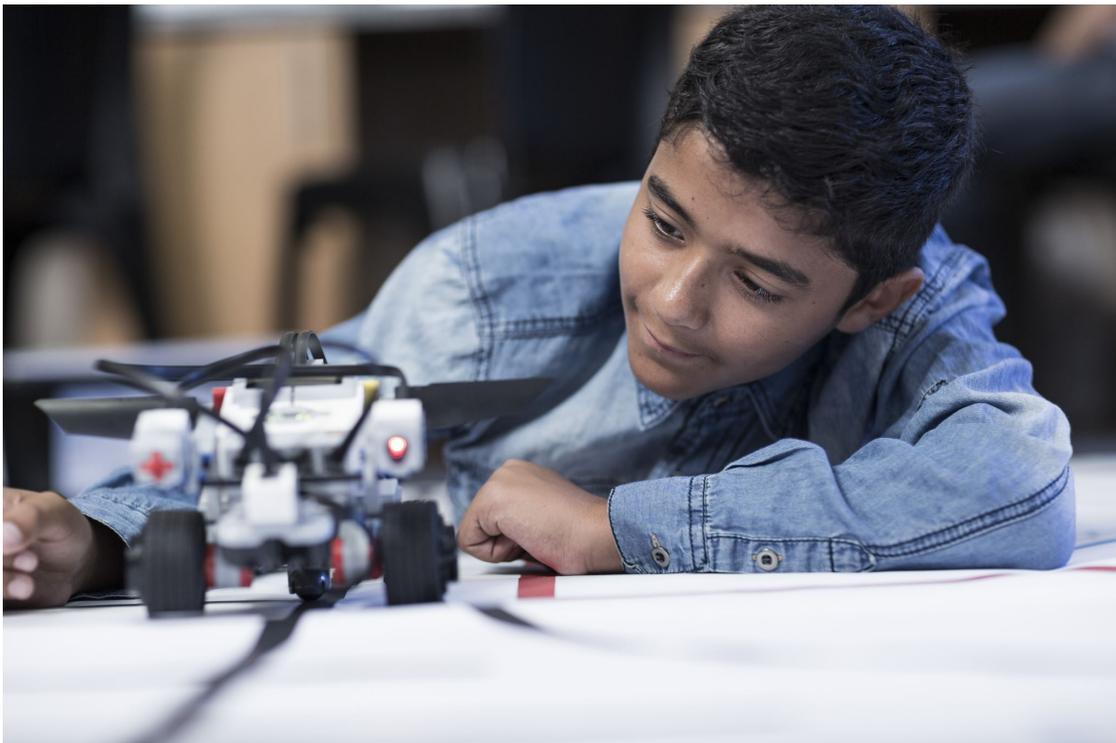
How? With testing and grades. We create assignments and tests to measure learning—a fruitless endeavor; you simply can't measure something that never ends.

Your students hand in your 100-point activity or test, and you grade it. Many students who perform poorly will want to improve their work. The moment you remove that option or suggest a lower grade for a retake, your class becomes a power struggle—not a place for learning. Students become frustrated and angry. Many wonder, Why should I even try?

## SHOCKINGLY SIMPLE FIX – MAKE RETAKES AND DO-OVERS ROUTINE AND WITHOUT PENALTY

A pandemic has taught us many things, including critical lessons about empathy, vulnerability, and prioritization. More than ever, teachers could empathize with students who were scared, overwhelmed, and anxious. Many teachers and administrators shared personal stories about the pain they felt for their struggling students and the extra effort they put in to help those kids succeed.

Suddenly, learning in any way possible was prioritized over the traditional get-it-done, get-a-grade, move-on education model.



As we all learned to manage a remote learning world, many students failed to complete assignments on time, missed key lessons, or couldn't finish some tests. Even the most traditional teachers had to re-evaluate their lessons.

They started forgiving late work and encouraging students to retake tests to demonstrate learning and improve their grades. In most cases, their students thrived with these options.

There is no reason this modern approach shouldn't continue.

Not only should we say yes when students ask to retake tests or redo activities or projects, but we should also encourage this approach. **Iteration is the foundation of learning**; it is also the part of teaching that is most rewarding.

Nothing in education is greater than seeing students engage in productive struggle on their way to success. This is what leads to lifelong learning. No student will ever look back and say, "I'm so grateful for Mrs. X because she never allowed me to retake tests or redo poor assignments, so I never learned anything."

## Finally...

We believe educators can impact their students' love for learning by making shockingly simple adjustments to their teaching practices. At Times 10 Publications, we provide practical solutions like these that busy educators can read today and use tomorrow.

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