How to Keep Students Organized in a Hybrid Model

Classroom Management

With the right systems in place and explicit coaching, middle school students are better prepared to stay on track with their assignments.

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If you're teaching in the hybrid model, as I am, you're likely facing an array of challenges as you try to keep students who are in the physical classroom and those who are remote on track.

I see it every day: Students receive an overwhelming amount of emails and other digital communication throughout the day that need to be organized, and students who work remotely don't have the benefit of reminders posted around the classroom, in-person reminders from their teacher and peers, or the bells ringing to tell them it is time to transition from one class to the next. Further confusion can be introduced when some are at school one day and at home the next, and among students who shuttle among parents, babysitters, and other caregivers throughout the week.

Since I'm a middle school teacher, much of my focus is on helping my students build executive functioning skills, which these days are as much a matter of necessity as of practice. I have carefully constructed online frameworks that support them through pandemic-era academic complexities and ramped up my coaching on the organizational front.

As I outline below, online systems keep my students on track, and specific strategies guide their own organization.

Establish Routines

In order to reduce the number of clicks for students, I use a single learning management system (Google Classroom) whenever possible.

I post a daily agenda, listed by date, that students can click on to see what's in store for that particular day, but also I post an entire week's agenda in advance so they can plan ahead as needed.

I post assignments using a consistent format within Google Classroom; assignments are grouped by unit, and once a unit is completed, it is moved to the bottom of the webpage. All assignments that must be turned in are labeled with a due date so that they can be pulled up within Google Classroom's to-do list. Course materials that are not required to be turned in are uploaded using the "materials" label so that those materials don't appear to be missing work, and the stream is used only for announcements and reminders.

By labeling content consistently, keeping assignments grouped by topic, and using digital due dates, students can quickly navigate to their assignments and stay focused on content.

I start and end class the same way each day: Class begins with a review of the daily agenda and upcoming assignments and ends with reminding students what is due the following day, as well as providing time for in-person and remote students to ask questions.

Give Advance Notice

The nature of hybrid learning requires students to plan much more than they ever needed to before. I provide them with a minimum of one week's advance notice for all assignments and spend a few minutes on Monday reviewing what is due that week. If they know they have an upcoming assignment that might be challenging, I encourage them to plan to reach out to me when they are in the physical classroom to get help or clarification.

Make Sure Information Is Concise

My students have expressed how overwhelmed they are by the sheer number of emails and Google Classroom notifications they receive every day—to the point where some have admitted that they do not always read the emails, even though doing so is essential. I reduce the amount of text I write, use bullets, and make sure that all information I send is essential so that students are more likely to read, comprehend, and respond as needed.

Keep Families Informed

As students are working remotely half of the time in the hybrid model, it is helpful for caregivers to have an idea of what they should see their kids doing and what questions to ask them about the content. Every Friday, I send an email to families that includes a brief outline of what we did that week, upcoming assignments, questions for discussion, and any

materials that students will need for the coming week. I also copy parents/guardians on all emails to students when I check in on assignments. It's helpful if adults are in the loop and can remind them.

Student Organization Tips

My students benefit from specific coaching on the following points.

To-do lists: I encourage students to keep a running to-do list digitally and on paper, as well as utilize the to-do list on Google Classroom to remind them of upcoming assignments.

Time to organize email: I have found that students need a set time in advisory (the time each day when students meet with their assigned faculty adviser and a small group of other students) to organize and delete emails. Providing this time helps them to stay digitally organized and develop effective organizational practices in a digital climate.

Materials and supplies: Asking students to establish a list of essential materials and supplies for remote and in-person learning helps them to arrive each day in their learning environment with the items they need to be successful.

To make sure that my systems and strategies are working, I periodically solicit feedback from students in Google Classroom regarding the organization and ease of accessing course materials. I use this feedback to continually improve my own digital organization to align with what works best for students.