

# "Classroom Management Tips for Guitar Class"

By Jim Rivera

*Jim has been the guitar instructor for Rio Rancho High School for the past 15 years. Many of his fine students have gone on to pursue music degrees at the University of New Mexico. Jim is a board member for the Summer Guitar Workshop. The following is a summary for his presentation to the New Mexico All-State Music Conference, January 2012.*



1. *Focus and routine*
  - a. *Establish a routine that will put the students in the right frame of mind and be ready to work. (Assign advanced students to help you tune guitars.*
  - b. *Use an electronic tuner to begin the class to get the students focused and ready.*
  - c. *Have some appropriate music playing when the students walk into class.*
  - d. *Have a warm up exercise that the students can practice before class begins.*
  - e. *Move from lesson to lesson smoothly and fluidly*
  - f. *If a lesson is working well extend the time that you originally set on it.*
2. *Far Sighted goals*
  - a. *What do you want the students to be able to do by the end of the semester.*
3. *Syllabus*
  - a. *Be well prepared every day and you will appear to be more skilled than you actually might be.*
4. *Set daily goals for the class (over plan your lesson)*
5. *Accentuate the positive*
  - a. *Show the students what you do best*
  - b. *Gain the students' respect by playing music they cannot play ( ex. Note reading)*
  - c. *Sightreading ( or note reading) is the great equalizer in multi-level guitar classes. Some students that are in your beginning guitar class will be far advanced but rest assured their reading skills will be rudimentary at best.*
  - d. *Conduct your ensembles.*
    1. *The students will benefit greatly from your conducting skills from teaching Band, Orchestra or Choir.*
    2. *Dynamics, articulation, tempo etc.*
5. *Music selection is critical*
  - a. *Find ensemble music that incorporates multi-level parts (Matt Hinsley) if your classes are multi-level.*
  - b. *If you use pop and other styles of music try to find "classics" that stand the test of time ( ex. Stand By Me)*
  - c. *Students really enjoy these songs and will request to play them often.*



6. *Success, success, success!*
  - a. *The simplest melodies can give students a sense of accomplishment. "Ode to Joy" "Yankee Doodle" etc.*
  - b. *One finger chords*
  - c. *Open string or single ensemble pieces*
  - d. *Find a Guitar method book that contains an accompanying CD so the class can play with an arranged accompaniment.*
  - e. *Use a variety of method books and use the best lessons from each book.*
  - f. *Simple ensemble music can go a long way in giving the students a sense of accomplishment.*
7. *Post classroom rules and consequences if the rules are broken (poster size)*
  - a. *Let the students know up front that rules must be followed.*
  - b. *Make an example of a rule breaker (but don't single out or embarrass the offender)*
8. *Write a daily agenda on the board so that the goals for the class period are clearly defined.*
9. *Use seating chart in the beginning.*
  - a. *Learn names faster*
  - b. *Can reduce disruption by seating best friends away from each other.*
10. *Find students that feed off of each other and allow them to sit together.*
  - a. *Once you get to know the students it will be advantageous for you to seat like- minded students together*
11. *Seat a responsible advanced student next to a beginner.*
  - a. *This can be helpful when a student is having trouble keeping up*
12. *Elevate your chair so you can be seen by students in the back row*
  - a. *Use a band directors podium*
13. *Do not allow students to play using poor posture, position and technique....ever!*
  - a. *This includes pop/rock/metal etc.*
14. *MBWA (Management By Walking Around)*
  - a. *Correct mistakes quickly*
  - b. *Check posture/position/technique*
  - c. *Make sure students are on-task*
  - d. *Get to know your students*
15. *Attitude is everything!*
  - a. *Your persona will set the tone for the class for the entire semester!*
  - b. *Be firm yet fair*
  - c. *Once the students get to know you then you can "ease up" and be yourself*
16. *Allow "project time" when students have been working hard.*
  - a. *I got special permission from the principle to use I-pods and other electronic devices as long as they were being used for educational purposes.*
  - b. *Gauge how much project time to give them. Start with 10 or 15 minutes and gradually increase project time relative to how long the students can stay on-task.*
  - c. *This time can be very productive and rewarding for students if distributed properly.*

*17. Don't be embarrassed to seek help when you feel overwhelmed.*

- a. I still seek out guitar teachers and try to get ideas from them.*
- b. I am constantly on the look out for new and exciting music that I think my students will enjoy and be challenged by.*
- c. I am still taking guitar classes in the summer and these classes have helped me immensely.*



*18. Experience is the best teacher.*

- a. Use what works and throw out what doesn't*
- b. Remember I made many mistakes and suffered dearly because of them*

*19. Reward system*

- a. Letter in guitar, stars, pins, gift cards*
- b. Section leaders, project time*