

# Zero Noise Signal

## PURPOSE

While a cooperative-learning classroom should have a healthy buzz, you certainly don't want noise to become a problem. The Zero Noise Signal is an easy way to quiet the class and focus students' attention on you. Use it whenever you have something the whole class ought to hear, when students need to bring the volume back down to acceptable levels, at the start or end of an activity, or when you want to refocus students who are off-task.

## BREAKING IT DOWN

To give the Zero Noise Signal:

- Stop talking, raise your hand in the air, and remain quiet as you wait for your students to respond.
- When the students see you give the signal, they should complete their sentences, then respond to the signal by raising their hands, turning their attention to you, and becoming silent.
- Keep your hand raised until all the students have returned the signal and the room is quiet. Wait until the students are alert and attentive before beginning to speak.



## FINE-TUNING THE TECHNIQUE

- Do not speak when your own hand is in the air, no matter how tempting it may be. The only way for the students to understand this technique is if you are a good model when you use it. If you absolutely must speak, lower your hand until you have finished talking.
- Do not move along in the lesson until all the students are silent and attentive. This might take some work, especially early in the year, but with consistent practice students will soon respond. Make it a game to see how quickly they can react. Challenge them to do better, for example by pitting their times against those of another class. Award team cooperation points for a quick response.
- If the signal doesn't seem to be working, ask yourself: Do I talk when my hand is in the air, or am I silent as a model for the students? Do students know they can finish their sentence before raising their hand? Do I wait for all the students' attention before going on?
- Add a nonverbal signal to help capture your students' attention. For example, flick the lights or clap twice before you raise your hand. This helps the students who are auditory learners or who have their backs to you.

Space the teams as far apart as is convenient for your classroom. Having teams separated from one another should help reduce noise and facilitate movement around the room. It also makes evacuation easier in case of emergency.

- If noise continues to be a problem, work with the students on developing a six-inch voice, a library voice, or an indoor voice. Include voice level as part of the criteria for team cooperation points. Praise teams for maintaining an appropriate volume, and give them one or two additional points when they do.
- Have fun with the Zero Noise Signal. Periodically develop a new signal (for instance, touching your left earlobe), and share it with the class. Keep a running score of which team responds first to the signal, and let the winning team at the end of the week choose a class privilege like being first in line for lunch as their reward.