



## Getting the Attention of Your Class

In the Hollywood version of the one room schoolhouse, students played and romped outside until the teacher rang the school bell for class to begin. The students were conditioned to come inside and quietly take their seats, hands folded, eyes front, and patiently wait for the teacher to begin the lessons of the day. Yeah, right!

Even the most experienced instructor has to regularly deal with the challenge of getting the attention of a class whether they are youth, adults, or a mixed bag of both. More often than not, hunter education courses are a mixed bag of student age levels. Regardless, getting the class attention in a positive way is important. The first few moments in a class are crucial ones. It sets the tone for the rest of the time.

The instructor must 1) move the students' attention from their own conversations and thoughts to the instructor, and 2) focus their attention on the course topic.

The following suggestions will help you get the kind of attention you need to begin your class.

**Use Pre-openers**  
A pre-opener

is an activity such as crossword puzzles, word-finds, fill in the blank or matching exercises, and other fun activities related to the lesson. Activity sheets are given to the students as they arrive or are laid out in advance on each desk. This gives the students something to do as they wait for the class to start. It also begins to focus their attention on the lesson topic. (Detailed examples of pre-opener activities will appear in a future issue of the *Journal*.)

### Use Silence

An instructor may attract the attention of the class by simply standing obviously but silently in front of the class. You must look as if you want and expect everyone's attention. Do not look hesitant or unsure or do anything else that may send a message that you are not ready to begin. Never start talking until you have the attention of the entire group. It may

take a few minutes, but it is worth it.

### Establish the Ground Rules

During the first class meeting inform the students of a signal that you will use after breaks and in future classes to indicate it is time to start. You may want to ask members to help you set the ground rules. If they are involved, they tend to be more responsive.

### Accentuate the Positive

Instead of calling down the unruly students, try recognizing those that are behaving, with a little praise. State the behaviors you are pleased about. For example, "Thanks Bill and Jenny for your attention."

Once you've gained the attention of the class, focus that attention on the lesson by:

- Displaying an object in front of the room
- Tell a story or tasteful joke related to the lesson content
- Ask a thought-provoking question
- Start

a video or video segment

- Write the session topic on the board and ask each class member to name one thing he or she knows about the subject.

Keep in mind that you should choose the "attention getting" and "attention keeping" method that fits your personality, the class setting and the lesson. Your approach may also vary from session to session. †

**Do Something** — If the noise and activity level of the students is a little too high, sometimes more drastic actions may be called for. You may signal for attention by:

- Saying loudly, but without shouting, "Lets get started," or "It's time to begin."
- Write on the board, or flip on an overhead projector with the words, "Attention! As soon as you read this, please be quiet!"
- Tap gently on the table as if using a gavel or use some other sound-making device. (One instructor uses a child's tricycle horn which he squeezes a couple of times; another blows a duck call.)
- Turn the lights on and off a couple of times.
- With smaller classes, go around the room and shake hands with each student and tell them it is time to begin or greet individuals by name.
- Compliment those that are ready to begin.
- Use humor. (Some instructors project a tasteful hunting related cartoon on screen.)
- Have the students elect or draw names for a class officer whose duty is to call the class to order.
- Do not threaten those who continue to talk or distract others. Remain calm and be firm but business like. It is not uncommon to have to put your foot down, remembering that you do not need to apologize, as this is your classroom.