

Ideas for Positive Reinforcement: Class Performance Points Charts

Overview:

This is a form of positive reinforcement that can also double as a reliable form of informal assessment. It has proved to be a useful process in application to older elementary levels and middle school levels, and has even been an effective technique to use with high school aged learners. The system works very much in the same way as a basic ‘balance sheet’ - allowing ‘credits’ for positive performance and ‘deductions’ for inappropriate performance. Each student starts with a set amount of points, and whether they progress up from that score, decrease in points, or finish at roughly the same level depends entirely on how they conduct themselves in class on a day-to-day basis.

Understanding the Class Performance Points Charts:

The basic Class Performance Points Chart (illustrated right) allows entries for up to six students per page. For each student, there are three kinds of CREDIT and three kinds of DEDUCTION that can be applied, each of which totals between 1 and 20 points that can be added or subtracted from a student’s starting score. The ‘Credits’ consist of *Using English*, *Quality of Work*, and *Making an Effort*. ‘Deductions’ include *Using L1* (i.e., the students’ mother language and not English), *Lack of Attention*, and *Lack of Effort*. The blue and red coloring is designed to show the distinction between positive and negative clearly.

Teacher: _____

Date: _____		CREDITS (Positive Performance Points)						DEDUCTIONS (Negative Performance Penalties)							
Student Name: _____		Using English	Quality of Work	Making an Effort	Using L1	Lack of Attention	Lack of Effort								
Start:	Finish:	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15
Student Name: _____		Using English	Quality of Work	Making an Effort	Using L1	Lack of Attention	Lack of Effort								
Start:	Finish:	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	
Student Name: _____		Using English	Quality of Work	Making an Effort	Using L1	Lack of Attention	Lack of Effort								
Start:	Finish:	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	
Student Name: _____		Using English	Quality of Work	Making an Effort	Using L1	Lack of Attention	Lack of Effort								
Start:	Finish:	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	
Student Name: _____		Using English	Quality of Work	Making an Effort	Using L1	Lack of Attention	Lack of Effort								
Start:	Finish:	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	
Student Name: _____		Using English	Quality of Work	Making an Effort	Using L1	Lack of Attention	Lack of Effort								
Start:	Finish:	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	11 12 13 14 15	

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These entries are deliberately general and non-specific, so that teachers can incorporate other criteria under some general considerations. For example, both ‘Using English’ and ‘Making an Effort’ could be grounds for awarding points for cooperative work amongst students. ‘Quality of Work’ could likewise refer to how much the students are attempting to improve their language use and make it more accurate. ‘Using L1’ refers to the times students either deliberately or inadvertently employ their mother language in the classroom instead of English, but teachers may not allocate penalties here in certain situations (for example, a student clearly doesn’t understand and would like to ask the teacher for clarification using a mutual L1).

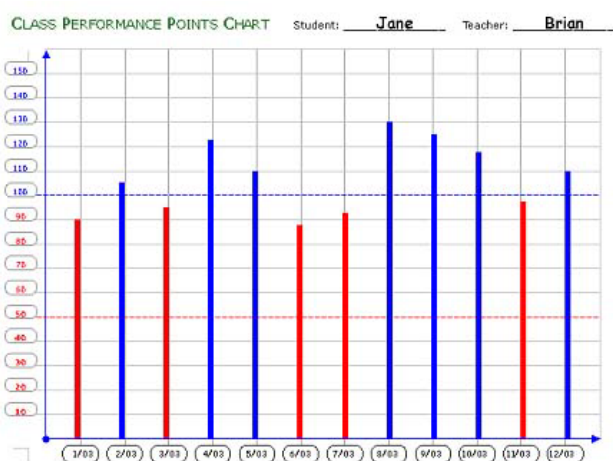
How to Apply:

As a basic guide, it is recommended that students begin each study session (not lesson) with 100 points, which gives them the opportunity to achieve up to 160 points or to sink as low as 40 points. The Chart can be displayed on the classroom wall or kept in a file - it is even possible to photocopy the chart for each lesson and distribute it to the entire class so that each student can reflect on how they and peers performed in the previous lesson.

The teacher observes the students each lesson and awards credits or allocates penalties according to pre-set criteria that have been set down and explained for the students. This is done by cross referencing particular student names on the chart and crossing off numbers in one or all of the three categories for positive or negative classroom conduct. A suggestion is to mark changes to the CREDITS category with blue circles or checks, whereas DEDUCTIONS can be marked with red crosses. Generally, most of the time teachers are presented with an 'either/or' equation. Did the student make an effort or didn't s/he? Did the student listen/pay attention during the class or not? Was there quality in the student's work? Did the student use English as much as possible during the lesson, and did s/he actually experiment and/or try to extend their language use?

Based on simple questions like these, students will be awarded credits and/or deductions for each lesson. Over a 20 day session, the credits and deductions can be easily tallied and applied to the 'starting' points to come up with an end of session score which will generally show whether progress has been achieved or not.

The key category here is 'Using L1' - with very important implications especially for homogenous EFL classrooms settings where it can be a real challenge to encourage students to refrain from gossiping away in their mother language. Whereas the other categories can be adjusted on a 'point per day/lesson' scale, it is recommended that the 'Using L1' category draw deductions for each time they occur. Students may therefore lose up to 5 or even 10 of these points in a single lesson! Hard as it may sound, the biggest challenge at older Elementary and Middle School levels is to get them into the habit of using English in the classroom as much as possible, and unfortunately (at least in my experience), often the best way to achieve this is to inflict penalties swiftly. During a given session, if a student loses all 20 of these points and also notched up penalties for 'lack of attention' and 'lack of effort', then the student (possibly along with the parents of the student) is most probably in need of direct counseling. In this case, it is useful to have a documented system to back up what the teacher is saying about the student's performance (or lack thereof). Note also that awarding points for Using English according to the same criteria (each time it occurs) will not be useful, because in many cases the student that uses English and their L1 in roughly equivalent amounts will end up with around the same points as they started out with. Unless the objective of the instruction is to just moderately increase the amount of English the students are to use in class and with each other, I recommend being quite strict and consistent in penalizing use of the L1 in the classroom.



At the end of a given 20 day session, the points can be tallied to create a performance score between 40 and 160. These scores can be plotted on individual student graphs (a completed example is illustrated left), which can be presented on the classroom wall or sent home as part of informal assessment measures. On the graph, a score of 100 or less could be marked with a red bar, as this basically shows that the student finished at or below the level they started at and therefore did not make any progress. Scores above 100 could be marked with a blue bar to indicate that progress in classroom performance took place.

Additional Comments:

This kind of positive reinforcement/informal assessment technique places the ball firmly in the students' court in terms of whether they want to achieve progress in the class or not. It also clearly illustrates the sorts of behavior the teacher/institution is looking for in the English language classroom. By this age, students should be increasingly taking more independent responsibility for their own learning and classroom conduct, and hopefully this is a system that allows teachers to show students clearly and impartially the degree to which they are achieving this.