

Teacher-to-Teacher: 4 Easy Ways to Leverage a Classroom Timer

By Michelle Taute

We recently shipped a case of our Time Timer 12" MAGNET to Luke Wiseman, an English teacher and Department Chair for English at Mariemont High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, and we wanted to see how these classroom timers were being put to use. Wiseman told us he's only handed out a few so far—they arrived at the end of the school year—but he's already a Time Timer fan and had some ideas for fellow teachers as he shares the rest of the timers in the fall. Here are four techniques for any classroom to try:

1. Creating Focus and Taking Brain Breaks.

All students struggle to focus at some point. But a visual timer can help break down work into reasonable chunks and allow students to build up discipline over time. At Mariemont High School, Wiseman says some teachers use a classroom countdown timer to intersperse focus periods with short breaks. Typically, teachers ask students to focus on one task for 20 minutes then declare a 3-minute brain break. This cycle might repeat a second time depending on the task. Students can glance up at a Time Timer and see exactly how much time they need to work before a break.

2. Empowering Students for Timed Assignments.

Wiseman first started using Time Timer to keep himself on track when giving short 10- or 15-minute talks to his class. Then one of his students asked to set the class timer for 40-minute writing timed sessions. "The kids really appreciate it," Wiseman says. "It's different than having to look at the clock. You can see the minutes or seconds tick away." This teaching tool also helps Wiseman show his students how to break down a 40-minute timed writing into stages (pre-writing, planning and drafting) and track themselves against the timer to allocate the appropriate number of minutes to each task.

3. Supporting Classroom Management.

"We have such a short amount of time with students in our classroom that we have to be very intentional and mindful about time," Wiseman says. Classroom timers can be a great, subtle way for teachers to reinforce classroom management. Defining timed segments for each activity helps get students on board by signaling there's a plan. And it can help students more seamlessly move from, say, a group activity back to their desks for individual work. They'll be watching the timer instead of relying on verbal cues from a teacher. A visual timer can help keep everyone on track and moving forward.

4. Building Confident, Independent Students.

With timed writing assignments, Wiseman has noticed a class timer helps his students relieve anxiety and feel more in control. Seeing the time disappear somehow creates a greater sense of security. It's also a tool for building more independent students. "It helps students self-manage when they know the time segments and see the time," Wiseman says. They can see when to pick up the pace to finish a task before time is up and when it's time to move from one activity to the next.