

Learn how **Laurie Kash** organizes her class to bring out the potential creativity of all her students.

## Limitless Possibilities Through Structure

**L**aurie Kash has done well over fifty theater productions. How she does it is very simple. She has the same students who love to act; design and build the sets; play or compose the music; sew the costumes; rig the lights; and everything else that goes into producing a show. Once they have the procedures down, they simply do the same for the next show.



Laurie demonstrates the importance structure can have on the creative process. Many people claim the key to true creativity is to have no limits. But Laurie understands that in the classroom, structure can open students to new and limitless possibilities. Laurie says, “Having predictable and reliable procedures for managing an arts class does not stifle the organic creativity so important to the arts. It provides enough structure to allow the teacher and students to be truly creative and truly free.”

Just like actors need to rehearse a play before they can perform it well, students need to rehearse procedures to perform them well. Even the most experienced pianist playing a Rachmaninoff sonata doesn’t perform it perfectly the first time. Likewise, students can’t be expected to perform procedures perfectly without practice, practice, practice!

**The first procedure she teaches is Circle Up.** On the first day of school, Laurie invites her students to join her on stage in a circle. She explains this is how they will begin class every day. The procedure is explained, demonstrated, and rehearsed. So on every day of the year thereafter, starting class is simple. Laurie says, “Circle up! Five, four, three, two, one!” and every student is waiting and ready to begin—in the circle formation.

Laurie uses five procedures to help keep her class running smoothly.

1. **Freeze!** When Laurie says, “Freeze!” her students stop speaking and stop moving immediately. This procedure helps Laurie maintain safety and efficiency in her classroom.



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2. **Fall!** Once students have frozen, Laurie uses this procedure to get her students to the floor for relaxation or guided imagination work. With the “Fall!” command, Laurie asks her students to slowly and carefully fall to the floor and lay down in their own space. “Freeze!” and “Fall!” are also used to transition or give new directions.
3. **Neutral Walk.** Laurie explains the “Neutral Walk” as walking “in your own space, at your own pace, and it doesn’t matter which direction you face.” This is not performance time; it is personal time for each student to be with his or her own thoughts.
4. **Quiet in Three, Two, One.** As students are working individually or in groups, Laurie gets their attention by saying, “Quiet in three. Quiet in two. Quiet in one.”
5. **Clear the Deck!** In the event of a sudden need to get students off the stage, Laurie says, “Clear the Deck!” All students know to clear the stage quickly and sit in the first three rows of the audience until Laurie confirms that everything is safe.

Like the Circle Up procedure, these five commands are introduced on the first day of school. They are demonstrated, rehearsed, and maintained throughout the school year. By taking the time to teach these six simple procedures on the first day, Laurie saves herself hours of time that she would have spent corralling and quieting her class between each activity every single day of the school year.

Know that in putting on a show, many things are going on simultaneously on and off-stage, from the actors, costume designers, scenic designers, musicians, and lighting and sound technicians. Everyone knows the production company’s procedures as these are taught when students audition to be a part of the show. During the auditions, she reviews her procedures for any new students and to remind students who have auditioned for productions before.

Laurie has a procedure for everything to keep things running smoothly. These are some of the procedures she has in place:

- ♦ Where to sit
- ♦ Where not to sit
- ♦ Bathroom breaks
- ♦ How to leave the room
- ♦ What to do if you need to leave early
- ♦ Use of cell phone
- ♦ How to arrange for pick up after rehearsals

In an arts class, there is need to constantly form groups. Laurie uses a procedure called **Numbered Body Parts**. As the name implies, Laurie calls out a number and then a body part. If she calls out, “Three elbows!” students gather in groups of three and touch their own elbow. If a group is missing people, they hold up the number of fingers of people they are missing and call out that number. Students not yet in a group make their way to a group in need of someone to complete the group.

While exploration and expression are important in an arts class, creating a safe space for students to work in is just as important. Laurie uses a **Yellow Flag Procedure** and **Red Flag Rule** to redirect students who may have crossed a line.

If a student begins to tell a story or make a remark that is inappropriate for a school setting, Laurie will call, “Yellow Flag!” This means that the student must choose a new direction for his story or reverse his remark.

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If the student continues his story or remark in an inappropriate manner, Laurie calls, “Red Flag!” and the student must stop speaking and sit out for the remainder of the exercise. **Yellow Flag is a procedure because it dictates how things are to be done, without mention of penalties or rewards. Red Flag is considered a rule because it dictates a consequence for how a student behaves.**

There is no wasted time during individual or small group rehearsal. Before beginning rehearsal, she tells her students the objectives of the lesson. She gives the students a time limit and specific goal to reach during rehearsal. **This is Guided Practice.** The structure for rehearsals limits wasted time and keeps rehearsal moving forward at a quick and energetic pace!

Procedures are even more important for audition time. Fairness and objectivity are fundamental. Procedures for an audition help assure that every student gets a fair chance.

Laurie has a rubric for auditions. Audition rubrics detail exactly what she will be looking for during auditions so that students know what and how to prepare. Audition rubrics also make it easier for her to take notes during a student’s audition. With a list of qualities she is looking for, she can circle or highlight what she sees without having to write it out.

Orson Welles, the respected American filmmaker, actor, theater director, screenwriter, and producer said, “The enemy of art is the absence of limitations.”

Procedures can enhance creativity, instill trust, and aid student achievement. Giving students parameters in which to create, will push students to explore and develop outlets of authentic expression that might not otherwise surface.

**Guiding students in a safe and predictable environment allows for freedom of expression, taking risks, and dreaming without fear of ridicule.**

**Procedures allow students to do—to grow—to consider—to become.**

