

Practice Profile: 5-to-1 Ratio

Evidence Level	Excellent (****)
Learning Curve	Pick up and go (1)
Ease of Use	No additional materials (1)
Class Time Required	Minimal (<30 min/week)

What is 5-to-1 Ratio?

5-to-1 Ratio is a practice in which teachers increase the number of positive interactions with students as compared to negative interactions. Throughout the school day teachers and students share numerous interactions, such as discussing academic content or providing feedback. Research has supported the idea that there is a “critical ratio” of positive to negative interactions between teachers and students to best support and sustain constructive student-teacher relationships. That ratio is to provide 5 positive interactions (e.g. friendly conversation, nonverbal acknowledgement, praise, and so forth) to every 1 negative interaction (e.g. punishment, criticism, and so forth) for each student. It is important to note that this is not just about complimenting students. Though compliments are one form of positive interaction, it is about forming positive relationships in general through all kinds of interactions.

How will this help my students?

The 5-to-1 Ratio is meant to improve students’ feelings of connectedness and positivity to facilitate the classroom experience. *The purpose is to improve academic engagement and decrease classroom disruption as a result of the more positive classroom climate.* By investing students in the value of the classroom through creating positive interactions, teachers can encourage better behavior and stronger feelings of student belonging in the classroom. Further, when students feel connected and more positive they are more likely to feel engaged and motivated to achieve academically.

How does 5-to-1 Ratio work?

The 5-to-1 ratio relies on two aspects. The first is for teachers to modify their interactions to increase positive interactions and minimize negative ones as needed to try to accomplish the preferred 5-1 ratio. The second is for teachers to carefully and objectively track their interactions with students to help support achieving the ratio. Though there is no structured approach, below are some suggestions to make tracking and increasing positive interactions more easily managed:

- 1) Tracking interactions with every student might feel very overwhelming. To alleviate this additional stress, here are some possibilities.
 - a. Limit tracking to only a few students each day.
 - b. Have fellow teachers or staff drop in and observe for brief periods of time and keep a count.
 - c. **Take care not to change normal behavior towards students while tracking.
- 2) For modifying interactions, here are ways to insert more positive interactions
 - a. Praise for correct answers (e.g. “You worked really hard on that one!”)
 - b. Appreciation of assignments or work done (e.g. “Thank you for getting your homework turned in. Great work!”)
 - c. Acknowledgement of character strengths when displayed (e.g. “That took a lot of courage to try that super difficult question!”)
 - d. Positive greetings in the mornings or after breaks (e.g. “Welcome back... I’m excited to get working with you all again”)
 - e. Gratitude for good behavior (e.g. “Thank you so much for helping ____ clear up the paper scraps”)
 - f. Taking a moment to check in with a student (e.g. “How’s your family?” “What did you do this weekend?”)
 - g. Inquiring about hobbies or interests (e.g. “I heard your track team has a meet this yesterday... how did you do?”)
 - h. Smile or give friendly gestures

One important note: This strategy is meant to be 5-to-1 for *EACH* student. That means that the ones that need the most focus for more positive interactions are also most likely to be the most challenging students. If it seems very difficult with certain students, consider it a work in progress and try to do a bit better each day with each student.

Common Barriers to Implementing the 5-to-1 Ratio

While the effectiveness of the 5-to-1 Ratio speaks for itself, there are a number of common concerns that come up. This section is meant to address some of these specific concerns and help provide guidance on how to implement the 5-to-1 Ratio in particular situations.

Too much effort

“While this sounds good on paper, it sounds like it would take an awful lot of effort!”

The 5-to-1 Ratio can be tough to use consistently at first. Just as teachers do not expect students to be perfect at any new concept, the 5-to-1 Ratio is not something that can be perfected in one day. However, the concept behind the 5-to-1 is to bring focus to increasing positive interactions. Just keeping it in mind and trying to reframe comments and interactions in positive ways will slowly build the ratio further towards the positive side. Relationships with students and the classroom atmosphere will reflect the effort!

Difficult students

“I agree this would be pretty great with most students, but this one student I have just has nothing about them that I can respond to positively!”

For the most difficult students, it can indeed be challenging to find a place to start. A good way to consider these students is to think of the most basic action to start with and build from there. For example, did the student come to class? “It’s great to see you here today!” Did they make eye contact during the lesson? “I like that you’re engaged in the lesson!” It is not impossible to implement the 5-to-1 with these students, it just takes starting at the most basic and shaping behavior from there.

Friend versus Teacher

“If I start trying to be their friend all the time, they are going to stop respecting me as their teacher.”

This can be a valid concern, particularly with older students. However, positivity in the classroom can still be kept within the teacher-student relationship. Consider ways to both create expectations of respect while also continuing to be positive.

What does 5-to-1 Ratio look like and sound like in the classroom?

The 5-to-1 ratio will lead to a more positive atmosphere and better student-teacher relationships. These often lead to a trickle-down effect towards better behavior in the classroom and improvements in academic effort and performance.

Students feel appreciated and important in the classroom

- Ulysses says to his father, "I really like Mrs. Hopper. She really nice and seems like she cares about all of us."
- The principal walks into Mr. Naples class and can feel the positive vibes in the room. All the students seem happy and regard Mr. Naples with respect.

Disruptive behavior is at a minimum and students are normally engaged academically

- It seems like no matter when the counselor walks into Ms. Miller's room, the students are always happily working on an activity or discussing a topic with Ms. Miller.
- Tom had always had trouble staying out of trouble, but he finds that his impulses to act out feel less strong in Mrs. Gerring's classroom. He says that he "feels bad because of how much she cares about me."

Students are generally more positive

- Grace really enjoys coming to Mr. Denver's class. The whole class just seems to care about each other, and she always feels comfortable asking questions knowing that the other students will never say something negative or mean to her.

What evidence is there for 5-to-1 Ratio’s effectiveness?

Though there has been extensive research behavior the 5-to-1 ratio in varying populations, experimental support in the middle school populations is just starting to get addressed.

Study	Key Findings	Major Outcomes
Cook et al., under review	This study investigated the results when teachers were provided feedback on their positive to negative interaction ratio and encouraged to increase positive interactions to fit the suggested ratio.	Decreased disruptive behavior and increased academic engagement

Reference List

Cook et al (under review). Evaluating the Impact of Teachers’ Ratio of Positive-to-Negative Interactions on Classroom Behavior: The 5-to-1 Ratio Proactive Classroom Management Strategy.

Fredrickson, B. L., & Losada, M. F. (2005). Positive affect and the complex dynamics of human flourishing. *American Psychologist*, 60(7), 678.