

Time to teach!

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Why is there never enough time for teachers to teach everything we want to, and for students to learn everything they need to?

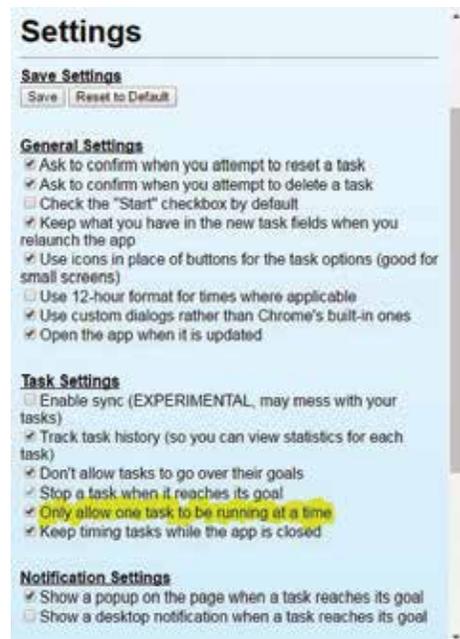
Struggling to answer this age-old question, we set out to make more out of less. Those of us who have entered the battleground, also known as the classroom, have realized that teaching is much more than delivering content. A large part of teaching is the almighty skill of classroom management. From preventing two children seated at the far end of the class making faces at each other, to keeping them awake and engaged, to getting them to do as you ask – the list goes on. Of course, there's also housekeeping – writing down homework, collecting worksheets, making sure everyone gets his/her stationery at the start of class and not five-minutes into the writing task, etc., etc. But even before any of this, we do a mental head count, tracking down stragglers who have just barely finished their lunch, or realized too little too late that they could really use the bathroom. Within the class too, we expend valuable time and energy ensuring students' transition quickly from one activity to the next. And finally, we end on that note too – helping them transition to the next class in time.

Alongside these challenges that teaching inherently poses, we felt additional pressure to improve student learning outcomes given that we work with students with learning difficulties. We strive day to day and moment to moment to bridge the gap between where students are and where they need to be. In the same vein, the parents from our community too had been pressuring to increase academic rigour.

In the past, schools have attempted to address this issue by lengthening the school day and year, or by providing more time to academic classes. However, school administrators have questioned whether it is worth expending more resources to do so, as it has led to minimal increase in student outcomes. Given these findings and our context, we felt that before overhauling our existing structures, we should try and maximize on the time we already have.

With many notions as to where and how we might be losing time in the classroom, we set out to better understand how we were using our class time through a time-tracking application called *Task Timer*. We recorded the time spent on different activities in a given class using this application. Activities were coded into different categories – for example, distributing homework was considered 'Classroom Behaviours'; a student-led individual activity, was considered 'Student Activity'; and so on. We were thus left with a breakdown of how much time was spent on each of the pre-decided categories, providing insight into how much time was actually spent teaching and learning, and how much was being demanded by additional tasks such as behaviour management and housekeeping.

A Google-based application, Task Timer is highly customizable, user-friendly, and free of cost. It allows the user to set as many timers as needed given their specific requirements. Further, the timers can be named by the user. Task Timer allows multiple timers to run either simultaneously or, allows switching between different timers, running only one at a time and pausing the previous one (settings → check "Only allow one task to be running at a time").

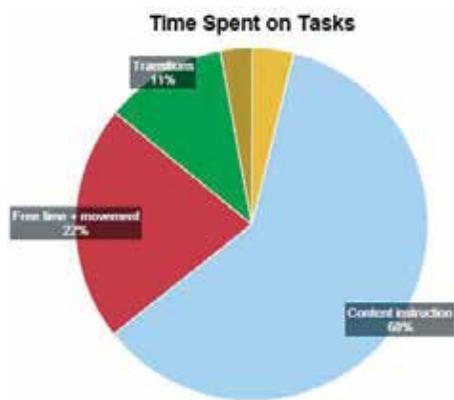


Double-click a task name, time, or goal to edit it.

Task	Time Spent	Goal	Progress	Options
Classroom Behaviours	0:01:08	Indefinite	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Free Time + Movement	0:00:00	Indefinite	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Wait time (more than 50% of students finished)	0:01:09	Indefinite	<div style="width: 10%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Transition	0:09:18	Indefinite	<div style="width: 15%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Content instruction (explaining)	0:04:24	Indefinite	<div style="width: 8%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Content instruction (guided)	0:26:45	Indefinite	<div style="width: 55%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Student activity (independent)	0:02:21	Indefinite	<div style="width: 4%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Student activity (group)	0:01:17	Indefinite	<div style="width: 2%;"></div>	▶ i ↺ ↻ ⊖
Totals	0:46:22	0:00:00	<div style="width: 0%;"></div>	▶ ↺ ↻ ⊖

Name	Goal (hours : minutes)	Start
<input type="text" value="Task Name"/>	<input type="text" value="0"/> : <input type="text" value="45"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indefinite	

Recorded times can be edited manually and certain timers can be reset as required. The data is output in the form of a pie-chart representing the division of time between the different timers – which, in our case represented different categories. The data is also available in an excel sheet format, making it extremely user-friendly and convenient.



How can Task Timer be utilized in the classroom?

- *To understand the breakdown of time in a classroom:* What am I using my class time to do? If it is hard to finish everything that's planned, what is taking away from my time? How can I modify my teaching, set-up, etc., to create more time?
- *To inform our own teaching practices:* Can I accomplish the same goals in a more efficient way by improving my practices or introducing new ones? Do students have unmet needs that I am not aware of and are taking away from teaching and learning?

This tool has provided insights into these questions and more. We are now beginning to make more out of less in the hope of teaching everything we want to so students may learn everything they need to!

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The authors were part of a Research and Development Team at The Gateway School of Mumbai – a non-profit school dedicated to serving students with learning challenges, located in Mumbai, India. Visit www.gatewayschoolmumbai.org for more information.