

3. “Why Should I Do It?” – Provide a Rationale

This is the third in a series of Autonomy-Supportive Behaviours that teachers can use in the classroom. Remember: You’re not responsible for creating motivated students; you’re responsible for creating an environment where students can motivate themselves.

In the previous write-up, you’re asked to Vitalize Students’ Motivational Resources when the activity is interesting to them. If the activity is uninteresting, however, you’ll explain why the activity is important.

What?

A rationale is a verbal explanation as to why putting in effort for the activity might be useful.

Why?

Not all lessons, classroom procedures, and behavioural requests are interesting or intuitive to students. You’ll often ask your students to do things that seem uninteresting and unimportant to them, e.g. reading a book, revising a paper, cleaning their desks, being on time, and waiting for their turn.

You have good reasons for asking them to do these things, but your reasons are often unknown to students. Their motivation is very fragile in these instances, and they wonder “Why do this? Do we really need to do this?”

When students don’t understand why you’re making the request for them to do it, they tend to view it as arbitrary, imposed, or meaningless busywork. To support their willingness to engage in the behavior, you’ll need to let them know the value and utility of the request.

When you verbally explain the rationale to your students, you help them to understand how the activity is personally useful, and so **students transform the way they see the activity:**



When?

This is most timely when you're asking your students to engage in a supposedly uninteresting or unappealing learning activity, rule, or procedure.

How?

Think "Why am I asking students to do this?"

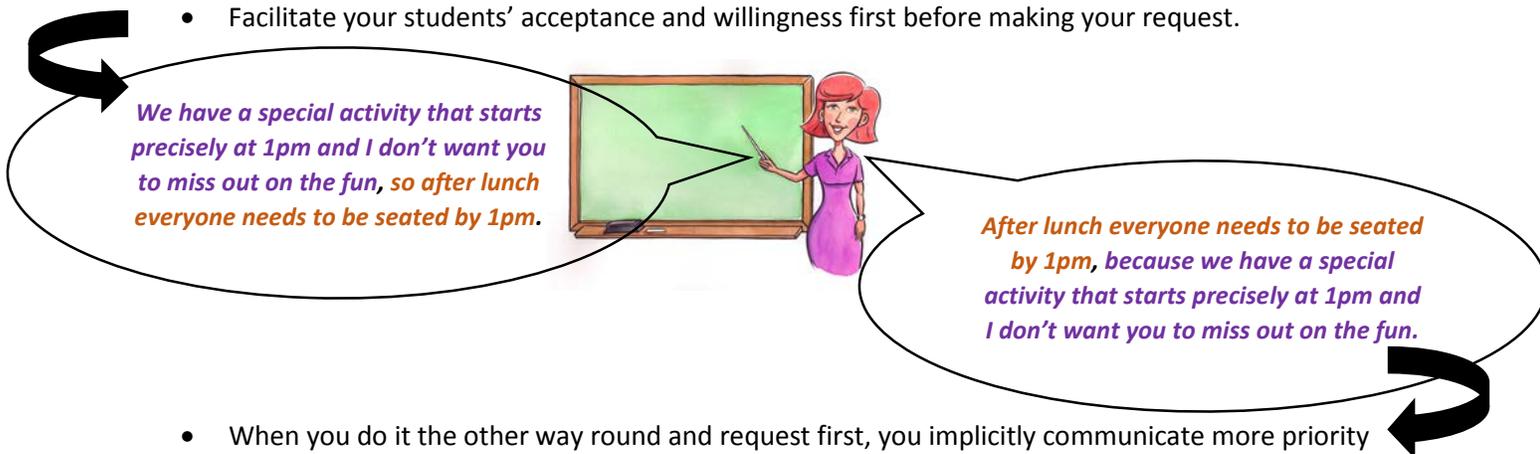
- If you cannot provide an explanation, chances are the activity is unnecessary busywork.
- You'll most likely have a good rationale – start being mindful of the *why?* behind your requests

Generate satisfying rationales for your students

- "Because I said so", "Because it's on the test", "Because it's good for you" are explanations, but are deeply unsatisfying for students and controlling
- Step into your students' shoes and ask if your rationale will be well-received. Explain what is truly important and useful to your students.
 - E.g. "So that you won't bump into others and cause a lot of noise" may seem like a good rationale to you for not running in corridors, but your students might find the fun and excitement more compelling than bumping into other people.
- When your students don't agree, keep in mind that your students don't yet know a personally important reason for doing the activity. Instead of assuming the worst of them, panicking and resorting to control ("Just do it!"), tell them your reason with no strings attached or hidden agendas.

Rationale first, request second.

- Facilitate your students' acceptance and willingness first before making your request.



- When you do it the other way round and request first, you implicitly communicate more priority for your request and less priority for the rationale.

Source: Reeve, J. (2016). *Autonomy-supportive teaching: What it is, how to do it*. W. C. Liu, J. C. K. Wang, & R. M. Ryan (Eds.). Springer Science+Business Media: Singapore. Written by C. M. Q. Sim, 2016.