

CLASSROOM JOBS: Because We're All in This Together

The idea of classroom jobs has always made sense to me because as a student in Chile, my classmates and I were responsible for the upkeep of our own classroom. There were no janitors or maintenance personnel so the members of each classroom had the duty of keeping things up. We each had occasional chores to do to help in the overall effort of running the school. Allowing students to help with the management of the classroom is remarkably helpful, and it is even more remarkable that it has not been standard practice in all U.S. classrooms. That is changing, however. The Google query "Classroom Jobs" yields 462,000,000 results, and a more specific "Classroom Jobs for Students" yields 178,000,000 results. The classroom jobs idea has been around for some time and there are many different iterations of it. Do an online search and you will find thousands of creative and useful classroom jobs for your students.

Years ago **Ben Slavic** came up with some unique classroom jobs specific to language teachers. His is a creative list and uniquely suited to his inimitable style. Ben's lengthy list is still available on his web site: benslavic.com. Many educators have contributed to the practice in the language teacher world and have modified classrooms jobs from other disciplines. I have credited the originators of the jobs to the best of my knowledge below. If you are aware of attribution corrections, please let me know.

Far too often school is little more than a place where students go to watch teachers work. That failed model had students passively watching while the education experts frantically did their jobs. We need stop doing that. We need to expect more out of our students. We need to involve them more—both in their own learning and in the management of the classroom. By regularly including students in the work of the classroom we send a strong message that we are all in this together, that we are all working toward a common goal. The seemingly small changes that are made when students have jobs in the classroom reap great rewards. Classroom jobs give students ownership. When they are part of the process they have a vested interest in seeing that things run smoothly and well. This buy-in helps with classroom management and can help boost the achievement of all students in the class.

Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden claimed that the secret to his success was that he was able to fit the players on his teams with the right jobs. Wooden claimed, for example, that if had built his team around Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Kareem would have been the all-time high scorer in collegiate basketball history, but his teams would not have won championships. Wooden didn't do that. Instead he built the team as a whole and gave everyone jobs—and his teams won. He didn't let the super stars do everything. His teams won because he was able to find out where every team member fit best. If we do something similar with the students in our classrooms, we will increase the likelihood of our students' overall success. We will be less stressed as teachers, and we will have happier students, increased engagement and better learning.

On a practical note, there is a lot to do in a classroom, and if we work together with our students it can run more efficiently. If students can do a task, let them do it. There are some things that **ONLY** the teacher can do—think, plan, create, facilitate and direct. Other tasks can be done by students, so they are asked to do them. We are all in this together and it only works when we all work. The rule of thumb for the teacher when it comes to work to be done in the classroom is: ***If it is a minimum wage job, let a student do it.*** Save your limited wits, focus, voice, feet, and back for the tasks that only you can do.

If your school or district allows it, volunteering for classroom jobs can become part of students' participation grade. Students might receive a grade in the participation category for volunteering for jobs and doing them well. If not, that is OK—classroom jobs can be most effective on a volunteer basis. The following list has some classroom jobs we can't do without in my classroom. **Yellow highlighting** indicates **special objects or materials** that help students to do these jobs.

*Credit for the classroom jobs described below comes from the sharing of many colleagues and it is not clear to me who first came up with each of these ideas, but special recognition goes to **Ben Slavic, Joe Nielson, Susan Gross, Grant Boulanger, Michele Whaley, Betsy Paskvan, Lauren Tauchman and Ron Wilber.***



CLASSROOM JOBS

Because We're All in This Together

DAILY JOBS

- Projector
- Door
- Lights
- Screen
- Window(s)
- Day/Date Changer
- Weather Changer
- Counter(s)
- Points Writer
- Sneeze Person
- Boss
- Scapegoat
- Librarian

AS-NEEDED JOBS

- Assignment Alphabetizer
- Greeter/Password
- Interpreter
- Host
- Candy Sharer
- Office Helper
- Technician

- Cookies/Treats
- Class Hero
- Graphic Designer for Special Person Interviewees
- Substitute
- Substitute's Substitute
- Word Highlighters

STORY-TELLING DAYS

- Actor(s)
- Props
- Specialty Actor(s)
- Word/Phrase Counter(s)

KINDERGARTEN READING

- Rug
- Cookie Reminder

GAME DAYS

- Game Points Writer
- Judge
- Activity M.C.

DAILY JOBS

- **Projector** Turns off the projector when the tardy bell rings—I tend to show fun videos during passing period to draw kids in to class early. Turns projector on and off as needed during the class. Advances PowerPoint slides as teacher or students are presenting, when needed.
- **Door** Opens and closes the door to the classroom as needed: when noise from the hallway is too loud, to control ventilation, or to lessen distractions coming from our classroom when we are doing a noisy activity. This is a good job for a kid with a lot of energy because this student may need to get up and down several times each class period.
- **Lights** Turns on the lights in the classroom when the tardy bell rings if a video is being shown. Also turns lights on and off as needed during class. Another good job for a high energy kid.
- **Projection Screen** Is in charge of putting the projection screen up and down, sometimes several times per class period, depending on media in use on that day. Must be a real “with it” student that pays attention and can read the direction the class is heading and act before being instructed. We usually need to “fire” (see the “**Boss**” job description below) one or two volunteers from this job in each class before the right person is found. This student raises the screen as soon as the tardy bell rings so that students can see the white board and begin their daily *Repasito* (Little Review) or bell ringer/sponge activity right away.
- **Window(s)** Opens and closes the window(s) and the shades at teacher direction or on their own to regulate classroom temperature. Only the student with the assigned window job is allowed to open and close the windows and the shades.
- **Day/Date Changer** Changes these day and the date for each new day first thing every morning so that students can see it in the target language in order to write it on their assignments. This student needs to be able to get to class a bit before first period every day. It helps to have all of these items written in the target language with magnetic tape on the back so that they can easily be stuck to the whiteboard: **the days of the week, the months, and the numbers 1-31, all written out in the target language.**
- **Weather Changer** Changes the description of the weather on the board as the weather changes throughout the day. It helps to have several **short weather phrases in the target language with magnetic tape on the back** so that students can easily change the weather description each class period as the weather changes.



- **PAT/Game Points Writer** Keeps track of the PAT points several times every day, but especially at the beginning and end of class. Must remind the teacher or the class will get no points, because points do not carry over from day to day if they forget to ask and record them. (For PAT/Game activity ideas, copy and paste this link:

<http://www.brycehedstrom.com/category/pat>)

- **Rejoinders Counter** Rejoinders are short, common expressions that keep a conversation going at little linguistic cost. Rejoinders are great for beginners to learn because they can participate in a conversation and keep the input coming relatively easily. Each class needs to say a certain number of rejoinders every day—and at appropriate times. This student can keep a tally with a **mechanical clicker/counter** and report the number at the end of class. Each class has a goal and can earn a reward for hitting or exceeding their rejoinders target.

- **Sneeze Person** Gets the attention of the class when someone sneezes and says, “*¡Clase! Uno, dos tres...*” (Class! One, two three...), and then the whole class says *¡Salud!* (Health!) which is the equivalent of *Gesundheit*, or *God bless you* in Spanish. We do this so that students do not break into English and pop the “magic Spanish bubble” we are creating by using the T.L. most of the time in class. The rest of the class responds to the sneeze person with a hearty “*¡Salud!*” like they mean it. As with other class procedures, if we do not feel the love, we repeat the process until they get it right. (Credit to **Grant Boulanger**)

Follow this cultural practice:

The first sneeze: *¡Salud!* (Health!)

The second sneeze *¡Amor!* (Love!)

The third sneeze *¡Dinero!* (Money!)

- **The Boss / El Jefe/ La Jefa** When a student fails to do their job well repeatedly, this person gets to make the decision to let him/her go or not. They need be able to read the mood of the class to aide in the decision. If the boss decides to let a person go from their job they say, “You’re fired!” in the target language: *¡Estás despedido/a!* Many “**Bosses**” take their jobs seriously. They do not fire at the first offense; instead they work with students that are not measuring up and help them to get better. Some bosses find them a more appropriate job or even invent a job that they can do. It is a joy to see this happen in the classroom.

- **Hostess / Host** Helps to make new students, substitutes, observers, and other visitors in the classroom feel welcome and comfortable by caring for their physical needs—helping with belongings, finding a place to sit, showing them around the school, etc. For adult observers, this includes preparing them a beverage, if they would like one, with the **Keurig coffee maker** in the back of the classroom. This needs to be a friendly, hospitable and observant student. The Host also fills empty water bottles from the filtered water dispenser. (Credit to **Betsy Paskvan**)



• **Interpreter** Helps new students, observers, and other visitors understand what is happening by getting up and sitting beside them and quietly engaging with them. The Interpreter listens to the teacher and speaks to the guests in English if they need help understanding the target language. He/She also gives observers and administrators a [Checklist for Observing a Foreign Language Classroom](#) so that they can have a context for what we are doing. The Interpreter also explains the activities that are going on in the class. This needs to be a student that understands the TL, understands the classroom routines and can communicate well. (Credit to **Michele Whaley**)

• **Scapegoat / The Guilty One / El Culpable** This person gets blamed (lovingly—remember this is all in good fun) for everything that goes wrong in class. Whether someone blurts out in English or if something is dropped, or someone can't find their assignment El Culpable gets the blame. He apologizes for it or, conversely, makes excuses and says "It's not my fault!" in the TL. This is a good job for a quiet kid that doesn't get much attention—sort of like negative attention is better than no attention. (Credit to **Ron Wilber**)



Here is an application form by Lauren Tauchman with her take on classroom jobs:

JOB REQUEST FORM

Nombre _____ Fecha _____

The more jobs you request, the more likely you are to get a job you want. You may rank your jobs in order of most to least desired.
You may request to continue your current job, but you may not get it.

He sido... (I have been)	Quisiera ser... (I would like to be)
<input type="checkbox"/> Counter	<input type="checkbox"/> Counter
<input type="checkbox"/> Host	<input type="checkbox"/> Host
<input type="checkbox"/> Teléfono	<input type="checkbox"/> Teléfono
<input type="checkbox"/> Tecnología	<input type="checkbox"/> Tecnología
<input type="checkbox"/> Timer	<input type="checkbox"/> Timer
<input type="checkbox"/> Planner checker	<input type="checkbox"/> Planner checker
<input type="checkbox"/> Salud!	<input type="checkbox"/> Salud!
<input type="checkbox"/> Unicornio	<input type="checkbox"/> Unicornio
<input type="checkbox"/> Pobrecito	<input type="checkbox"/> Pobrecito
<input type="checkbox"/> ¿POR QUEEEE?	<input type="checkbox"/> ¿POR QUEEEE?
<input type="checkbox"/> Who? Owl	<input type="checkbox"/> Who? Owl
<input type="checkbox"/> Date changer	<input type="checkbox"/> Date changer
<input type="checkbox"/> Story artist	<input type="checkbox"/> Story artist
<input type="checkbox"/> Story details writer	<input type="checkbox"/> Story details writer
<input type="checkbox"/> Quiz Writer	<input type="checkbox"/> Quiz Writer
<input type="checkbox"/> Class hero	<input type="checkbox"/> Class hero
<input type="checkbox"/> Caballero/Knight	<input type="checkbox"/> Caballero/Knight
<input type="checkbox"/> Secretario	<input type="checkbox"/> Secretario
<input type="checkbox"/> Prop master	<input type="checkbox"/> Prop master
<input type="checkbox"/> Photographer	<input type="checkbox"/> Photographer
<input type="checkbox"/> Points writer	<input type="checkbox"/> Points writer
<input type="checkbox"/> Policía	<input type="checkbox"/> Policía
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper passer	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper passer
<input type="checkbox"/> Sub	<input type="checkbox"/> Sub
<input type="checkbox"/> Cognate Clarifier	<input type="checkbox"/> Cognate Clarifier
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

AS-NEEDED JOBS (NOT EVERY DAY)

• **Assignment Alphabetizer** This is a revolving job—almost every student in the classroom will do this job eventually. When papers are turned in, the teacher calls two student names, one from each side of the classroom. Students on each side hand papers to the designee, who gathers them all and rushes to the middle. Last one there alphabetizes the papers by last name and places them on the teacher’s desk. The sorter also checks to see there is a legible first and last name on the paper and that all papers have the date written in the target language, the class period and the title clearly written on them.

This job saves the teacher many, many hours of sorting papers and tracking down students who did not write their names on their papers. (*Credit to **Fred Jones**, in Tools for Teaching*)

• **Candy Sharer** Shares candy or treats that the teacher has provided. There is a basket that is labeled *Comparte conmigo (Share with me)* by the teacher’s desk. The basket is filled with wrapped candy at random times to encourage student spontaneity in using the target language and to give students a brain break. The Candy Sharer walks around the room offering candy to students that ask politely in the target language. This is also used as a prize for PAT competitions. (*Credit to **Joe Neilson***)

• **Office Aide** Goes to get copies, make copies, deliver messages, etc. Must have good attendance and be trustworthy.

• **Technician** Helps with technology when it doesn’t work. Knows how to run the DVD player, the projector, the speakers, the computer, iPad apps, etc. and helps as needed, especially with substitutes.

• **Class Hero** Gets the flyswatter or other means to track down and dispatch flies, bees, wasps, spiders, or any other pests that are bothering us (irksome students not included). Helps the teacher or other students with physical problems, if needed.

• **Graphic Designer for Special Person Interviewees** Finds images that fit the description(s) of the student(s) that have been interviewed as the *Person Especial* this week and prepares them to be displayed for the class. This job is intense and may need to be changed every week.

• **Substitute** Does the job(s) of absent students. This student needs to be on the ball, because they need to realize what needs to be done and know how to do it.

• **Substitute’s Substitute** Does the job(s) of absent substitute. This student needs to be on the ball, because they need to realize what needs to be done and know how to do it.



- **Greeter/Password Checker** If the teacher is delayed or absent, this student stands at the doorway of the classroom and greets fellow students as they enter. Students tell the Greeter the password at the door as they would the teacher. Students may not enter the classroom until they have said the password, so this job ensures that all students can get into the room on time.

TEMPORARY JOBS

- **Special Word Highlighters** These jobs last only until students in the class understand the highlighted words. These students help to emphasize important or abstract words that students need to know—especially at the beginning of Spanish I. Whenever the teacher says one of these words, the Highlighter for that word interrupts and loudly repeats the word so that students will notice and understand it, usually with an action. (*Linda Li & Ben Slavic*)

JOBS FOR STORY-TELLING DAYS

These next jobs are often going on all at once on days that we invent/ask/tell a story.

- **Actor(s)** Having many available actors is helpful, but we only need one or two good actors per class to make the stories come alive. Actors need to understand the target language and coordinate their actions with the words of the teacher. Actors are often called upon to act crazy and be expressively creative, but they also need to be able to just stand there like a prop for long periods of time while the teacher asks questions about the story and verifies details. (*Credit to Blaine Ray*)
- **Specialty Actor(s)** These are students that are “experts” at something. They are used only on some story days. A Specialty Actor may be a student that has horses, and a horse comes up in the story, so an expert is needed to check details about horses, to act like a horse, or to handle an imaginary horse. It can also be a role such as a student that is very persuasive, so when someone needs to be convinced, that student is brought into the story. A Specialty Actor can even be a student that enjoys acting like a tree, a window or a door—no language production, but it can be a fun part. (*Credit to Susan Gross*)
- **Props** Gets the props (clothing, stuffed animals, plastic food, and other common objects) to support the actors. This student keeps the props and wardrobe organized for quick and easy access.
- **Target Structure Counter(s)** Counts the number of times a new grammatical structure or word is used during the class period. This helps the teacher to discover if there are enough repetitions being used for students to have a reasonable shot at acquiring a word. This can be very enlightening when you think you have said a word over and over, but you only said it a paltry six times. May keep track with a mechanical clicker/counter. (*Credit to Ben Slavic*)

JOBS FOR KINDERGARTEN READING DAY

- **Rug Person** Gets out the **big rug** and unrolls it for students to sit on during kindergarten reading time. Rolls it back up and puts it away afterwards.
- **Cookies** This student volunteers the day before to bring cookies to share with the class while they are being read to during Kindergarten Reading time. NOTE: Check with your school before you do this. Many schools, districts and states no longer allow home made products into schools. Some also require verification that no nuts, gluten or soy products (to say nothing of controlled substances) are involved in the processing due to extreme allergies and other health concerns.
- **Cookies Reminder** This student is in charge of recruiting and reminding someone to bring cookies for Kindergarten Reading day.

JOBS FOR GAME & ACTIVITY (P.A.T.) DAYS

(For game and activity ideas that are rich in comprehensible input and stay in the target language, copy and paste this link: <http://www.brycehedstrom.com/category/pat>)

- **Activity Points Writer / Judge** When the class is playing a game on a game day this student stands at the board and records the points for the game or activity. Kids love competition but the action can be too difficult for just the teacher to track.
- **Activity M.C.** This is a person that has distinguished her/himself by responsibility, charisma and leadership ability. This must be a take-charge type and be quick witted. They are standing in for the teacher, who models game decorum in the class for several weeks beforehand and trains the class in expected and acceptable behavior during games. This student really helps to free up teacher time to deal with students that need help getting caught up on the side or to do paperwork while the class is busy playing a game.

OTHER JOBS

- **Student Aide** Another extremely helpful job is a student aide. This is different from a classroom job, in that it is an official class for the student. Some schools give upper classmen credit for being a student aide. The aide organizes the classroom library, puts up posters, makes copies, scans drawings into the computer, films the class (if no videographer is available), adds materials to web sites for students and any other task that needs to be done.