

Progress Charts In The English Classroom

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Over the years I have found that a system of progress charts works very well in my English classes and below I set out some tips for using these:

Why have them?

1. It's motivating.
2. They encourage team spirit.
3. Children like to win. There's always a spirit of competition in us and a prize, however small, is always appreciated.
4. There's a goal to aim for.

How to go about using progress charts.

1. First you have to decide whether you are going to work on an individual or a team basis. From my own experience, individual progress charts are not so successful because only the best students have a chance of winning.
2. A team effort is better. Here weak students can contribute in different ways from the better students. Some children may be bad in grammar but good in spelling or writing or neatness and so they can contribute something in their own way.

How to give marks.

The allocation of marks for work is left very much up to the individual teacher. This is the way I do it:

+ marks for:

- (a) Good work, e.g. grammatical correctness.
- (b) Covering exercise books.
- (c) Answering questions. This encourages responsiveness during any oral work.
- (d) Using a dictionary. I also give marks for owning a dictionary. I feel a dictionary is important in the classroom and I insist that every student always has one with him
- (e) Recall of previously taught vocabulary.
- (f) Specific exercises that have been marked with 'Good' or 'Very Good' in the students' English books.
- (g) Examination marks whether monthly or termly. Marks could be allocated in the following way:

80%	—	3 marks
70–79	—	2 marks
60–69	—	1 mark

– marks too: (I don't know whether you will agree!)

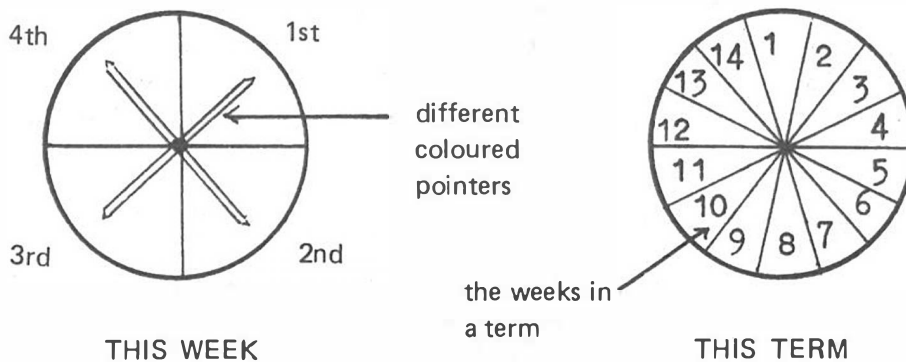
- (a) For not bringing books to the English class.
- (b) For not doing homework or other preparatory work.
- (c) For not bringing a dictionary.
- (d) For untidiness.
- (e) For writing dates incorrectly in exercise books.
- (f) Forgetting to pass up homework or class work.

On the whole I feel fewer 'negative' marks should be given compared with positive marks. The aim of setting negative marks is to let children know that they cannot get away with slipshod work or with an indifferent attitude towards learning English.

Add up the marks at the end of the week for each group. Get a group leader to do this. Every Monday (or Sunday in some states) start afresh.

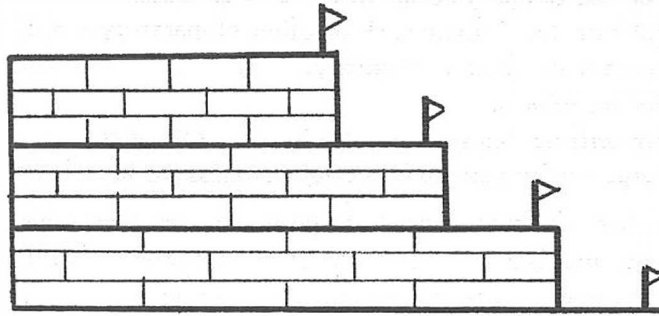
Progress Charts:

1. Wheels of Success



1. Note that the Wheel of Success on a weekly basis has four segments numbered first, second, third and fourth.
2. Each group in the class has a different coloured pointer like the hands of a clock.
3. When a team comes out first for the week they colour the 'first' segment with their team colour. The other teams can fill in their colours in the correct order of success as well.
4. If there is a tie for first position for the week, divide the segment in half and put in both teams' colours.
5. The teacher should keep a record of the weekly performance throughout the whole year.
6. The Term Wheel of Success should have sufficient segments to correspond with the number of weeks in the term (13 or 14). At the end of each week the winning team can also enter their colour on the Term Wheel corresponding to the appropriate week.

2 Steps of Success



1. This is a variation on the Wheels of Success. There are three steps representing the three terms in the school year.
2. On each step there are thirteen or fourteen bricks representing the weeks in each term.
3. Each brick will be coloured in (one per week) with the colour of the winning team for that week.
4. Flags in the team colours can be placed in descending order on the steps to show the weekly position of each group. The fourth flag will be on the lowermost line. Instead of flags the pupils may like to choose other objects to represent their team. Boys might like horses or cars while girls may like small pictures of birds or flowers.

The prizes

1. It is not the cost that matters. Novelty things such as pencil sharpeners, small notebooks, pens, key rings, pencil cases, etc. make good prizes.
2. You may like to give prizes to each member of the best team on a termly basis or just a yearly basis. The more often the prizes the more motivated the students will be to give of their best and to make sure that team members cooperate and contribute.

How to divide pupils into teams

1. It is ideal to have four teams in the class.
2. I think it is important to stress to the pupils at the beginning of the year that these Progress teams have nothing to do with Sports Houses or other teams in the school.
3. Give each team a colour for the purpose of colouring the charts and for easy identification.
4. In addition, each team could give itself a name but all teams should be of the same category, e.g. all cars or all birds, etc.
5. Let pupils practise democracy by electing their own leader for each team. He will be responsible for the organizational side such as adding up weekly marks, colouring the chart, etc. Stress that only leaders can do these tasks otherwise chaos can result.
6. When you are allocating pupils to a certain team make sure that the teams are even in terms of weak students and good students. If necessary, enlist the help of the former class teacher in allocating pupils. The initial distribution may not be final but can allow scope for change in the composition of each team later in the term.

Problems

1. What about the temptation of cheating? The danger is there but that should not deter us. I have come across cases of this myself and have used it as an opportunity to teach the class honesty. Most often, the honest pupils are sure to complain and catch the dishonest pupils without the teacher being told. But if it gets so bad that pupils complain to you, you can investigate and threaten to abandon the project. This has worked in my case. Usually the majority of the pupils are only too keen to keep the system working.
2. What about charts being destroyed? Obviously the safest place to keep the charts is behind a locked, glass-case notice-board. However, most school classrooms do not possess these. Generally destruction of the charts is not a problem as the pupils look upon them as 'theirs' and therefore have an interest in seeing that they remain intact.

Word of warning

Once you embark on this scheme, follow it through till the end. If you suddenly find you are transferred to another school or you are asked to attend a course, give away the prizes based on what has been accomplished so far. Don't go off with the progress chart 'dangling' and expect your colleague who takes over from you to continue. He/She may not be willing to take on the responsibility of your charts and the pupils will find it frustrating that the job has not been completed. Remember too, that projects like these take a lot of time and energy to prepare and to work well. You will have to be efficient and consistent in the awarding of marks although much of the burden of calculating the marks can be taken on by the pupils.

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