

Classroom Management of Mobile Devices: The Traffic Signal Approach

It's the big question circulating through my school, and probably most of yours right now: **Should I let my students use mobile devices in class?** As you probably already know, cell phones can be a great tool for instruction. They provide opportunities for individual feedback with tools like PollEverywhere (<https://teachbytes.com/2012/03/21/poll everywhere-and-5-classroom-uses-2/>), as well as quick access to web resources for those students with smartphones. However, they can also be a distraction during classroom activities, especially for students who have a tendency to get off task.

So what is to be done? Should they be banned completely? If they are allowed, how do educators enforce when students should have cell phones out and when they should be put away?

As always, it depends on each classroom and each individual instructor. Nonetheless, I wanted to share with you an approach to classroom management of cell phone usage that is simple and easy to implement: the Traffic Signal Approach.

The Traffic Signal Approach breaks down mobile device usage in the classroom into three manageable components:

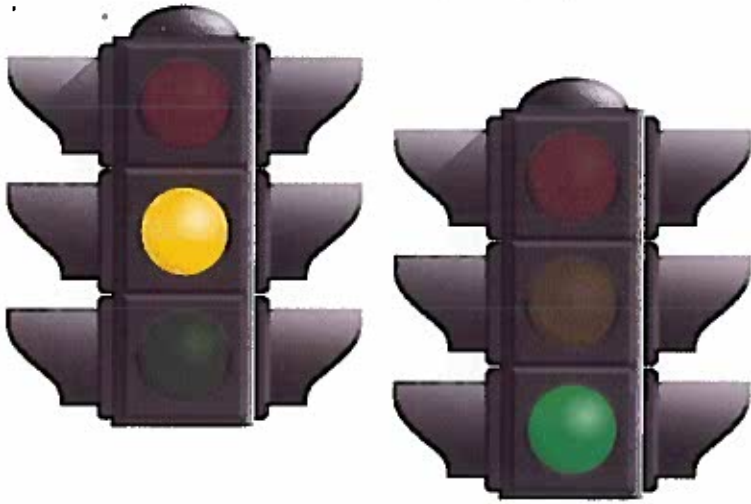


RED LIGHT

Students must have their cell phones and other electronic devices completely put away. Any visibility of these devices will incur consequences as designated by classroom policies such as having cell phones confiscated. This light is useful for test-taking, and other situations where you want student attention to be completely focused on the task at hand.

YELLOW LIGHT

Students may have their cell phones out as long as they are being used for educational purposes. Any misuse or inappropriate behavior will result in consequences as outlined in classroom policies, such as loss of cell-phone privilege or confiscation. This light is useful when students are doing independent research, and other situations where cell phones may prove to be a good resource.



GREEN LIGHT

Students must have their cell phones out for a classroom activity. Any misuse or inappropriate behavior will result in consequences as outlined in classroom policies, such as loss of participation points or confiscation. This light is intended for situations in which the teacher is leading students in an activity that utilizes mobile devices, and other situations where cell phones are necessary to participate.

By setting up these components ahead of time, either with a working traffic signal or simply three different colored cards (red, yellow and green), mobile devices in the classroom can become more manageable. As with any other classroom policy, to ensure success educators must clearly outline expectations and guidelines with the traffic signal, and explain in detail what each signal means. Once these guidelines are put in place however, the traffic signal can become an easy way to let students know what they should be doing with their mobile devices!

Update: Check out [this great website \(http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/other/flash/traffic.swf\)](http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/other/flash/traffic.swf) to display a traffic signal on your screen or overhead! (Simply click on the colored light to turn it on!)