Behavior-Specific Praise

50 phrases that actually work

“Good job” feels nice, but it doesn't tell a student what they did right. **Behavior-specific praise** names the exact behavior, so students know what to do again. It's one of the simplest, best-supported classroom strategies there is.

The formula

Name the behavior + why it matters (optional) + a warm tone.

INSTEAD OF	TRY
“Good job.”	“You started your writing right away. That gave you time to finish.”
“Nice.”	“You raised your hand and waited. Thank you.”

Quick tips

- Praise right away, while the behavior is still happening or just finished.
- Aim for about four praise statements for every correction.
- Praise effort and strategies, not just correct answers.
- Some students prefer quiet praise. A whisper, a sticky note, or a thumbs-up counts too.

Getting started

1. You got your materials out right away.
2. You started on the first problem without a reminder.
3. You read the directions before you began.
4. You found your seat and got ready in under a minute.
5. You checked the board to see what to do first.
6. You picked a spot where you can focus. Smart choice.
7. You put your phone away and got started.
8. You wrote your name and the date first. Great habit.
9. You asked a question to get started instead of waiting.
10. You were ready as soon as the bell rang.

Effort and sticking with it

11. You kept going even when that one got hard.
12. You tried a different way when the first one didn't work.
13. You checked your work before turning it in.
14. You erased and fixed that mistake on your own.
15. You stayed focused for the whole 15 minutes.
16. You went back and added more detail.
17. You asked for help when you got stuck. That's what good learners do.
18. You used the example to figure it out.
19. You finished every problem, even the long ones.
20. You took a deep breath and tried again.

Following directions and routines

21. You followed all three steps of the directions.
22. You lined up quietly and kept your hands to yourself.
23. You walked in the hallway the whole way.
24. You cleaned up your area before the timer ended.
25. You put the supplies back where they belong.
26. You used a whisper voice during work time.
27. You raised your hand and waited to be called on.
28. You turned your work in to the right basket.
29. You stopped and looked at me when I gave the signal.
30. You followed the new routine on the first try.

Kindness and teamwork

31. You shared the materials without being asked.
32. You listened while your partner was talking.
33. You gave your group member a turn to answer.
34. You helped a classmate without giving away the answer.
35. You said something kind about their idea.
36. You invited someone new to join your group.
37. You disagreed politely and explained why.
38. You said thank you when they helped you.
39. You took turns fairly during the game.
40. You noticed someone needed help and offered.

Calm bodies and transitions

41. You stopped as soon as the timer went off.
42. You switched to math without any fuss.
43. You asked for a break instead of leaving your seat.
44. You used your calm-down strategy when you got frustrated.
45. You came back from break ready to work.
46. You waited patiently while I helped another student.
47. You told me you were upset using your words.
48. You handled that change in plans really calmly.
49. You took your break and came back on time.
50. You kept your body calm, even when the room got loud.

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