

## PRECISE PRAISE

### DECISION-MAKING PRACTICE

**Objective:** To strengthen differentiating between student actions that merit **acknowledgment** vs. **praise**. (See more on Pg 3.)

**Directions:** The first column in the chart below describes a typical classroom situation. Complete the chart by choosing the type of response you think the student action merits. In the third column, script an example of effective language for the type of response you chose. This activity may be done solo but it's better with a group or team so that you may discuss your answers with your peers.

	Situation	Type of Response (Acknowledgment or Praise)	Response
1	A student who struggles to look at the speaker catches herself looking out the window and turns her body to face a peer speaker	<i>Acknowledgment</i>	<i>"Thank you for having your eyes on Joseph, Mahogany. That's how we do it."</i>
2	Chronically unprepared student brings in her pencil and begins class correctly		
3	A student answers your question with a complete sentence, as you expect.		
4	A student delivers a well-thought out complete answer of unusually high quality.		

5	Student uses a difficult vocabulary word in a sentence without prompting		
6	Student turns negative attitude around from the morning		
7	A student who normally shouts out the answer raises her hand		
8	<i>Draft a situation that will come up in your classroom:</i>	Acknowledgment	
9	<i>Draft a situation that will come up in your classroom:</i>	Praise	

# **Differentiate Acknowledgment and Praise**

**Acknowledgment is what you often use when a student meets your expectations. Praise is what you use when a student exceeds expectations.** An acknowledgment merely describes a productive behavior or perhaps thanks a student for doing it, without adding a value judgment and with a modulated tone. Praise adds judgment words like “great” or “fantastic” or the kind of enthusiastic tone which implies that such words might apply. “Thanks for being ready, Marcus” is an acknowledgment; “Fantastic insight, Marcus” is praise. “Marcus is ready” is acknowledgment; “Great job, Marcus” is praise. Distinguishing the two is important, as reversing some of the examples will demonstrate. If I tell Marcus it’s fantastic that he’s ready for class, I suggest that this is more than I expect from my students. Ironically, in praising this behavior I tell my students that my standards are pretty low and that perhaps that I am a bit surprised that Marcus met my expectations. Perhaps they aren’t expectations after all. **Either way, praising students for merely meeting expectations may reduce the degree to which they do so over the long run.** It also makes your praise seem “cheap.” A teacher who continually praises what’s expected risks trivializing both the praise and the things she really wishes to label “great,” eroding the ability to give meaningful verbal rewards and to identify behavior that is truly worthy of notice. **In short, save your praise for when it is truly earned and use acknowledgment freely to reinforce expectations.**