

Survival tip: start a list.

Before you do something, you have to figure out what it is that needs doing.

Checklist

- Get organized.
- Check school policy.
- Know your rights.
- Make procedural decisions.
- Keep tax records.
- Establish the rules.
- Build relationships.
- Find a shoulder.
- Support your association.
- Store supplies.
- Know the rules.

Before the first day

Get organized. Start off the year by getting your personal papers organized. You never know when you may have to produce a document related to your job. Your certification, appraisal scores, and professional development records are very important. Set up a good record keeping system.

Check school policy. If you intend to teach subject matter that may be considered controversial, be sure you are within board policy. In the classroom, keep your personal views on religion and politics to yourself.

Know your rights. Review your contract so that you will know your contractual rights. Study relevant district policies to know your rights.

Make procedural decisions. School will begin much more smoothly if you have decided in advance how to handle routine procedures. It is especially important for you to develop classroom discipline procedures that follow your district's policy and guidelines. Elementary teachers should decide on a system for: taking attendance, book and paper distribution, money collection, restroom visits, fire drills, classroom entrances and exits, and bus loading. Secondary teachers need to decide how to: take attendance, deal with tardy students, make assignments, collect papers, handle make-up work, and give hall passes.

Keep tax records. During the year, you may have expenditures that could be deductions on your income tax. Now is the time to set aside a place for keeping tax records and to start keeping track of them.

Establish the rules. If you want discipline to work during the year, start off by establishing class rules right at the beginning. Let the stu-

dents have a role in establishing the discipline procedure. If students help create the rules, they have more of a tendency to follow them. Rules should be written and posted in the classroom. Review your district and campus discipline codes.

Build relationships. Get to know the school secretary and the custodians. Get involved in school activities and school staff functions. Meet the teachers on your hall. They can be of real help in the first few weeks of school. And take the time to say "hello" to other important people in your building: the librarians, the counselors, the school nurses, and the cafeteria workers.

Find a shoulder. Every teacher needs a colleague to turn to for special advice. If you don't have a "buddy," find one, or reach out and be a buddy to someone else.

Support your association. Your local education association can be a great source of moral support from people who understand the difficulty of your job and who can provide you with assistance during the coming year and your teaching career. If you meet other new teachers who haven't joined, invite them to. There's power in numbers!



Available from the NEA Professional Library:

Countdown to the First Day of School by Schell and Burden; 22 pp., 2000, stock #2162200; non-members \$6.95, NEA members \$5.50

Bright Ideas by Mary C. Clement; 56 pp., 1997, stock #2164900; non-members \$5.95, NEA members \$4.50

Order by calling 1-800-229-4200 or visiting www.nea.org/books.

Planning for the **first day**

Give your classroom some class. Try decorating your classroom in a manner that will catch the eyes of your students and give them something to think about at the same time. Make sure your classroom is friendly and livable for opening day. Put up pictures, design a colorful bulletin board, and add a few plants.

Introduce yourself. Post a biographical sketch of yourself inside your classroom and encourage others to follow suit. You never know when a student or parent may find he or she has something in common with a teacher and is able to strike up a relationship that could be a positive learning experience.

Develop resources. Develop your own sources of information and your resource list. Know where to get help when you need it. How can you deal with the lack of instructional materials offered by the district? Keep your eyes open for free and inexpensive materials. Determine what materials you want to collect from students' homes and when you will need them. Be sure to check district policy on materials before asking students to bring items from home.

Be prepared for special students. You may have students with special learning problems or physical handicaps. Plan from the beginning how you will work with them in the best interests of the student, yourself, and the rest of the class. Don't be afraid to ask for information and assistance with special students.

Make an early determination about how you will handle students with special health problems. Do you know what to do if you have a student subject to epileptic seizures? What about administering medicine to students?

Learn your way around. Familiarize yourself with the building. Locate exits, principal's office, gym, nurse's office, cafeteria, supply room, faculty lounge, media center, etc.

Get your materials ready. Obtain blank forms such as hall passes and textbook forms. Identify the forms that will be used the first week, what information should be included and how they are handled. Obtain supplies provided by the school and learn how to keep track of them. Among supplies you'll need are: paper, pencils, pens, paper clips, masking tape, scotch tape, scissors, chalk, stapler, and staples. Find out how to obtain textbooks. If you are a floating teacher, prepare a means of moving materials from room to room, such as a luggage dolly with a small basket.

Store supplies. Go through the storage and filing cabinets and decide where to store things to which students will have access and things to which only you will have access. Be careful with money, calculators, your grade book, test answer keys, etc.

Know the rules. Get acquainted beforehand with school policies and procedures, such as opening and closing hours, attendance procedures, fire drill regulations, lunchroom regulations, nurse services, etc. Set up a notebook or folder to hold official notices, policies, and schedules.

Plan, plan, plan. Create lesson plans for the first few days. Plan at least twice as much as you think you can cover. Write down everything. Detailed plans will provide you a feeling of security when facing the class for the first time. Prepare a set of lesson plans for a substitute that you keep in your desk in case a sudden emergency comes up during the year.

Survival tip: start planning now!

Your first day in the classroom will run much smoother if you take the opportunity to do some preparations ahead of time.

Checklist

- Give your classroom some class.
- Introduce yourself.
- Develop resources.
- Be prepared for special students.
- Learn your way around.
- Get your materials ready.
- Store supplies.
- Know the rules.

Survival tip: make the first day mean something.

How you start off will influence the way things go from here.

Checklist

- Get there early.
- Greet your pupils.
- Make a good impression.
- Brief your students.
- Make a seating chart.
- Build your Rolodex.
- Get down to business.
- Communicate with parents.
- Foster curiosity.
- Start off slowly.
- Set a positive tone.
- Set a class goal.

What to do the first day

Get there early. On the first morning, arrive early so you'll have time to ask any last minute questions, go over final plans, and relax before the students come in.

Greet your pupils. Stand at the door when the pupils arrive. Have your name written on the chalkboard. Greet the students with a smile and a pleasant "Good morning." Encourage them to be seated and remain so.

Make a good impression. Whatever else you do, give the class the impression from the beginning that you are well organized. Your students must get the feeling right off that you are prepared and know what you are doing.

Brief your students. At the high school level particularly, let your students know early exactly what you expect of them in your course. Most students will rise to the teacher's expectations.

Make a seating chart. This will help you learn students' names much more quickly especially at the secondary level where you may have 140+ students.

If you have non-English speaking students, try to seat them next to bilingual children. Even if you have no children who are bilingual in the appropriate languages, pair each non-English speaking child with one who does speak English who can serve as guide, tutor, and language instructor.

Build your Rolodex. Give each student an index card to fill out with the names of his/her parent or guardian, work and home phone numbers, home address(es), and email addresses. With younger students you will have to do this for them. This is one of a teacher's most valuable tools during the course of the school year.

Get down to business. Make opening exercises brief. Your goal for the morning is to get

down to the business at hand. Make the first day of school a real one. Accomplish some constructive learning with your students. A good start yields big dividends later on.

Communicate with parents. Send a note home early informing parents that you need time to get to know pupils before you can comment on them. Let them know that you are available, however, and list the process and times for getting in touch with you. Taking the time to send home information to parents about class rules and procedures on the first day of class can prevent problems later in the year.

Foster curiosity. Keep in mind that if you want your students to be curious, you have to set an atmosphere that encourages curiosity and doesn't stifle it.

Start off slowly. Go over your material slowly the first grading period so that most students can find some success while the material is not too difficult.

Set a positive tone. Send a positive note home with every student at some time during each grading period. Catch the kids being good!

Set a class goal. You can develop some spirit among class members if you have a project you are working toward, perhaps a holiday project to help a needy family, a class trip, or a class party at the end of the year. Start planning early in the fall to build enthusiasm. Be sure to check on your school's policy regarding parties before planning one.

Build an attitude. You have the opportunity from the first day forward to help your students determine whether school is drudgery or a serious undertaking that can have its fun moments, as well. If you for one moment give the impression that being in class is a chore for you, your students will reflect that attitude.

Survival tip: have a game plan.

Specific Elementary Activities

- Greet the children at the door as they come in, and give them nametags that are easy to read and affix. Allow them to choose desks, then tape an identical nametag to the desk.
- Explain procedures for entering the room each morning: where to hang coats, when to be in seats, how much conversation is permissible. It is important to develop a routine and stick to it.
- Tell how you will start each day—e.g., with the Pledge of Allegiance and a song—then have them do it.
- Describe how the lunch count, attendance, and other daily tasks will be handled, and explain procedures for children's absences and tardiness.
- Read the specific rules for behavior along with consequences and rewards. Point out the poster, bulletin board, or chalkboard where they are listed.
- Give students a tour of the room and show them materials they may use.
- Establish a specific location on the chalkboard or bulletin board for daily schedules, homework assignments, and reminders of events and deadlines.
- Discuss and outline the basis on which students' grades are determined.
- Plan a get-acquainted activity. Bounce a ball in a circle. As it comes to each student, he or she says his or her own name or the name of the child to whom

he or she is going to bounce it. Have each child draw a self-portrait; display them on the bulletin board.

- Schedule a restroom break early in the morning the first day.
- Explain what students should do if they finish their work early.
- If you plan an activity period, demonstrate the procedures for getting out materials and putting them away.
- Tell your class what is about to happen before they leave for physical education, lunch, or other outside activities. Tell younger children how you want them to line up and have them practice a couple of times.
- Vary activities and the pace of lessons the first day and every day; younger children especially need frequent breaks involving physical activity.
- Reserve the last 15-20 minutes the first day to clean up and review what has been covered—the content and procedures they've learned and the activities they performed. Remind them of homework assignments, and describe briefly what they will be doing the next day.
- Hand out any notices for parents or pin them on younger children's clothing.
- Explain procedures for dismissal and bus loading. Be sure to allow enough time for the latter. It's confusing, and buses must leave at scheduled times.

Specific Secondary Activities

- Stand at the door to greet students.
- Introduce yourself, including your background and special interests in your subject, and then introduce the students to one another.
- Have students write on notecards their address, phone number, email, and names of parents or guardians. If students are employed, ask them to write how many hours they work per week and where. You may also want them to add any special needs they have (needs to sit close to chalkboard, asthma, etc.).
- Hand out any notices from the school office and have students complete forms required by the school.
- Outline your procedures for recording attendance and tardiness, giving assignments, collecting papers, making up work, and obtaining hall passes.
- Post rules for classroom behavior on a bulletin board, poster, or—for the first few days—on a chalkboard. You can have the class help make rules, but be realistic about the rules they have no choice about.
- Establish a uniform heading for papers.
- Discuss and outline the basis on which students' grades are determined. They must understand the procedure.