

Survival tip: be realistic.

Analyze, prioritize, organize, delegate, and learn to just say “no” to get the most out of your day.

Checklist

- Keep a time log.
- Examine your day.
- Prioritize.
- Relax.
- Just say “no.”
- Note the strategies for coping with procrastination on the right.
- Make a schedule.
- Learn to delegate.
- Write it down.
- Develop a class conduct sheet.
- Post signs.
- Start an attendance drawer.
- Grade papers in class.
- Let students make their own tests.
- Develop a code.

Making the most of time

Although you can't get any more hours from a day, you can learn to be more productive with the time you have. Training yourself to prioritize and to avoid procrastination can lead to a healthier and more enjoyable lifestyle. Gaining control begins by discovering how you currently spend your time.

Keep a time log. Try to make brief notations every fifteen minutes throughout the day. Keep the log for two or three weeks.

Examine and prioritize. See if time is being wasted on low-priority tasks. One useful system, described in Alan Lakein's book *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life*, assigns each task a priority rating of A, B, or C. Setting aside time to complete lesson plans on Friday may rate an A, making up a test to be used two weeks from now, a B or C. Your focus should be on scheduling time for the “A” tasks. Get “absolute musts” accomplished early in the day when you have the most energy, and avoid that frantic feeling throughout the day.

Plan your day. Setting a direction to your day starts with creating a TO-DO list. Your daily TO-DO list should be limited to 10 prioritized items. You may even want to estimate the time that each task should take and try to stay within that time limit.

Just say no. Ask yourself, “How terrible would it be if I didn't do this low-priority item?” If the answer is “Not too terrible,” don't do it or move it to the next day's list. Declining additional responsibility might sometimes be the best course of action. “No” is a responsible answer. To help you say no, you can:

- Use nonverbal language. Ninety percent of the message you send to another person is in voice tone and body language.
- Be direct and honest.
- Avoid defensiveness—you have the right to your own life and to work out your own plan.
- Be brief. The longer you talk, the more

likely you'll end up saying yes.

- Hesitate for at least 10 seconds before giving a response that will commit you to an action.
- Use the broken record technique. Prepare a response ahead of time, and each time you are asked, replay the response.
- Suggest alternatives.

Avoid procrastination. Procrastination means performing low-priority activities rather than high-priority activities. Procrastination results in more work, more pressure, the loss of self-esteem, and health problems. Here are some coping strategies for each of the major reasons people procrastinate:

Completing an unpleasant task

- Decide what to do and do it first.
- Delegate the task to someone else.
- Reward yourself after completing the task.
- Set a deadline.
- Work on it for no less than five minutes.

Handling a difficult or overwhelming task

- Use positive self-talk (focus on past accomplishments that turned out well).
- Break the job into smaller tasks, and include those tasks each day.
- Ask for help.

Dealing with indecision

- Make a list of possible positive and negative results of a decision, and see which list is longer.
- Set up a schedule and a target date for a decision. Do whatever research you can before the target date. Make your decision on that date.
- Flip a coin! Reflect on how you feel about the outcome. If you feel good, the toss came out the way you wanted the decision to go; if you feel disappointed, you wanted it to go the other way. Now follow your decision.

Conquering a fear of failure

- Have realistic goals. No one is perfect, so there will be setbacks. Focus on your successes.
- Just do it! It may be difficult, but doing the thing you fear most will help you conquer your fear and improve your self-esteem.
- Plan exactly how you will tackle this project. Feeling prepared may alleviate the stress that might otherwise hinder your success.

Remember to relax. Use periods of rest and diversion during the day to restore your energy. It is inefficient to work when tired—a few minutes of rest may improve and increase your productivity to higher levels.

Try these quick tricks:

- Stand up and stretch.
- Take a short leisurely walk.
- Find a quiet place and close your eyes for a few minutes.
- Just sit. Space out, listen to music, or simply watch the world go by.
- Chat with a friend about something other than school.

Start getting organized with these teacher-tested time savers

Color-code your grade book. You'll be amazed how much confusion can be avoided when you color code your grade book. Put all matters pertaining to attendance in green, grades in red, other information such as students' names and grade level in black, and special assignments or projects in another color. Labels above the assignment squares indicate what the grade or paper was for and saves searching later.

Make a schedule. A schedule can add to your efficiency, but it must be realistic. Don't take on more than one human being can handle in one day.

Learn to delegate. Make use of your teacher's aide (if you have one), and be sure to use student volunteers to assist you with routine clerical chores.

Write it down. No one can remember every-

thing. Keep a list and take notes in your calendar or day planner. Organize yourself so that you write everything in one book or calendar.

Develop a class conduct sheet. Let students know what is expected of them so that they cannot offer the frail "but you didn't tell me" excuse for misconduct. Send a copy of the sheet home to parents so they know what behavior is expected of their child as well.

Post signs. Posters are quick and easy room decorators. Try posting a sign on your room door, "Did you bring your book to class?" Post another sign with the school's daily schedule. It helps keep everyone on track.

Start an attendance drawer. You'll find it helpful to keep a separate drawer for daily attendance reports—especially when you must settle a dispute about when someone was absent from your class. In addition to marking the absence in your grade book, prepare a daily report sheet. Place a dash and the number of the period absent beside the person's name.

Create an absentee center. Instruct students to go directly to this area after they are absent. Create folders for an assignment list, handouts, and a schedule for making up tests and quizzes. Of course, let students know that you will answer any questions they have after they visit the center.

Create a tardy notebook. Instead of grabbing the attendance sheet every time a student arrives late, let them sign in. Place a notebook by the classroom door and instruct students to write their name in the book if they arrive after the bell. You can then mark everyone at the same time once the class has started their day's activities.

Take advantage of the resources available. Ask co-workers if they are interested in sharing lesson plans. You can get some great ideas from others even if you aren't teaching the same unit. There are also several ready-made lesson plans available on the internet.

Grade papers in class. Let the students

swap-grade less important daily work. If a class is slow, give quick quizzes to keep them sharp, and let the class grade these. Collect essays and read them to the class, mistakes and all. Let the class see if they can correct the sentences. Students will get practice spotting errors and the author has an instant critique with no stigma attached since nobody but you knows whose paper is being read.

Let students make their own tests. When finished with a unit, assign a review of the material and have students make up sample questions. Take up the papers and read them for your test. This procedure forces students to review and study for the test. It also gives a good indication of what students may have missed.

Develop a code. Code tests and lesson plans so you will know the date the sheet was made up. When it's out of date or you make a better one, pitch it.

Find a quiet work area. It may be difficult, but finding an area to work without interruptions will increase your concentration and efficiency.

Don't rush. Working too quickly is counter-productive; you will spend more time correcting your mistakes later. Do things right the first time.

Complain effectively. Analyze what is making your job difficult or impossible, how the problem can be solved, and who has the power to solve it—often that person is you. Complain only to the person or persons with the power to change the situation. Don't waste time moaning in the faculty lounge; contact your association representative!



Available from the NEA Professional Library:

The First-Year Teacher: Teaching with Confidence (K-8) by Bosch and Kersey; revised edition, 168 pp., 2000, stock #2014600; non-members \$20.95, NEA members \$16.95

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