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The New Teacher's GUIDE to a Successful Year

“The hardest part about being a teacher is not teaching. It is managing everything and everyone around you. Be organized and don't let the negativity of others consume you.”

—B.V.

“I started out too nice, and my students were so disrespectful. Now I know I can't be their friend.”

—C.G.

The words of these first-year teachers are insightful and provide good advice for beginning teachers. Along with a positive attitude, what you do the first days of school will determine the course of the rest of the year. The following suggestions will help ensure a successful first year in teaching.

↳ **Have a Vision.** Success begins with a vision. Set goals, develop a plan, and monitor your progress throughout the year.

↳ **Be Ready.** Organize your classroom space, resources, and materials.

Create a plan and calendar to manage your time, student work, and administrative paperwork.

↳ **Build Positive Relationships.**

Building positive relationships with students and their families is essential to good classroom management and academic success. Get to know your students and their interests. Greet students at the door each day and acknowledge when students return after being absent. Send home an introductory letter before the start of school to establish a positive home-school relationship.

↳ **Establish and Prioritize Procedures and Routines.** The #1 problem in most classrooms is a lack of procedures and routines, not discipline (Wong and Wong 2004). Begin-



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ning day one, teach, model, and rehearse classroom procedures (e.g., entering and exiting the room, distributing or collecting papers, turning in complete work, getting help). Implement routine activities (e.g., taking roll, morning exercises, grading homework), and post a daily agenda so students know what to expect.

↳ **Set High Academic Standards.**

Effective teachers hold high expectations for all students and scaffold lessons to ensure student success. Boredom is the doorway to student misconduct. Vary instructional strategies to make learning fun, meaningful, and interesting.

↳ **Overplan for the First Few Days of School.** Your main priority during the first weeks of school is to create a safe and productive learning environment. Ninety percent of what you do should be related to establishing procedures and routines. Plan thoroughly for how you will introduce yourself, learn about your students, and teach the most critical classroom procedures.

↳ **Be Professional.** Many first-year teachers learn the hard way that you cannot be your students' buddy, friend, or pal. While you should be friendly, you have a role to play: You are responsible for student learning. Be professional and dress for success.

↳ **Post Assignments.** Keep students informed of all assignments and due dates. Return graded assignments quickly so that students receive regular and immediate feedback on their progress.

↳ **Communicate Behavioral Expectations.** A system of rules and consequences will help to establish and maintain physical and psychological safety in your classroom. Brainstorm a set of 4–5 general classroom rules, as well as positive and negative consequences. Consider having students codevelop this discipline system with you on the first day of school. Student input increases student ownership of the rules. Lead, but avoid being a dictator. Remember, democracy is learned through practice.

↳ **Follow District Policy.** Districts provide legal and ethical guidelines within their policies. In all situations, resolve to do

Classroom Resources:

- bulletin board items
- resource books
- posters
- units
- grade book
- planning notebook/calendar
- assessment materials
- student files
- parent communication log

Materials:

- items for instructional centers and classroom library
- science equipment
- math manipulatives
- writing paper
- art supplies
- game boards

what a “reasonable and prudent” person would do in a similar situation.

↳ **Keep a Conference Documentation**

Folder. Maintain a record of all disciplinary actions taken with students as well as communications with students and their guardians.

↳ **Students First.** Commit to doing what is best for students, not what is most efficient or easiest for you.

With the recent focus on raising test scores, it is easy to narrow one's focus on instructional planning. Though effective instruction is important, society is counting on public schools to produce citizens that demonstrate “democratic habits of thought and action” (Dewey 1987, 225). As a classroom leader, you are in the preeminent position to help create a more caring, civil, and just society. Never lose sight of why you became a teacher. 🍏

References & Resources

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