

A Guide for New Teachers

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We gathered our top articles of **new teacher advice** to create this ultimate guide. Each section provides real-world advice from REAL teachers. They've faced the same challenges you may be facing and have included their tips and tricks to make your life as a new teacher a little easier. From planning tips to self-care, bookmark this mashup of our best new teacher advice articles to win the day, stay sane, and thrive in your new career as a teacher!

Congratulations! You made it through college and student teaching. You aced the interview, and now you're off to begin your career in the classroom.

Then it dawns on you: "I'm on my own. What am I supposed to do now?"

That will not be the last time you ask yourself that question.



I would be lying if I said my first year was amazing. I would not be honest with you if I didn't describe the struggles I endured that year. I'm headed into my eighth year of teaching, and I still find myself asking the same thing: "What am I supposed to do now?"

There are a lot of things that college and student teaching don't prepare you for when you have your own classroom. Now, with seven years of teaching under my belt, I feel qualified enough to lend these 10 pieces of advice to all the first-year teachers out there.

1. Find the most positive, passionate staff members in the school and befriend them right away.

It doesn't matter what their position is, find them and cultivate a relationship with them. In my first year, my best friends were the school secretary, the bookkeeper, and the plant operator. No matter how my day was going, good or bad, I could always go to any of them and talk about whatever was going on. If I needed anything done in my room, a door unlocked, or a special piece of furniture, the plant operator helped me out.

(Of course, you need to be sure to thank those people. Donuts and pizza are cheap and delicious. Candy bars and chocolates go a long way in showing appreciation to those who help you along the way!)

I also found three other teachers who radiated passion for their subject. I grabbed onto them right away, and they are now three of my best friends. We are constantly challenging each other to be better than we were the day before. They have helped me grow and develop as a teacher, and I credit a lot of my success to my relationships with them.

Stay away from the Debbie Downers and the complainers, they'll just bring you down with them, and you'll run the risk of becoming cynical yourself.

2. Find out who the master teachers are and pick their brains.

It's your first year, and even though you may have an idea of what you want to happen in your room, understand that what you plan to do and what you end up doing may be two different things. Find those **master teachers** with experience under their belts, ask them how they manage their room and use their advice to adapt your teaching style.

Master teachers have been in the school environment for a while, and trust me when I tell you that your new school will have a completely different environment than the one you worked in as a student teacher. Take advantage of their knowledge and experience as you mold your teaching style to fit the needs of your students.

3. Develop your own genuine teaching style.

One of the most common mistakes I have noticed with new teachers, and one I made myself, is trying to teach in the same style as your cooperating teacher from your student teaching experience. Unfortunately, what worked for them won't always translate to a different set of kids in another school.

You cannot be anyone but yourself. I tried for much of my first year to convince myself that I had to be exactly like my cooperating teacher, and I bombed. It wasn't until three-quarters of the way through the year that I let go and started being myself. My students noticed, and I started getting the results I was looking for. (Bonus: said results gave me major momentum heading into my second year.)

Your teaching style should directly mirror your true personality. If you're a goof, be a goof; if you're quiet and reserved, be quiet and reserved! You can maintain order in your classroom (see below!) without changing your personality. It's exhausting to continually put on a facade, and kids will notice the difference.

4. Create an environment of positivity and a culture that values teamwork.

"You may very well be the only positive adult in a student's life. Your room may be the only place a student will feel safe, loved, wanted, and included."

You may very well be the only positive adult in a student's life. Your room may be the only place a student will feel safe, loved, wanted, and included. Work to create that welcoming environment immediately. I didn't discover this until my second year, and once I figured it out, things took off!

When I taught middle school, my first two days of the year were spent entirely on team building exercises, "getting to know you" icebreakers, and activities designed to foster positive self-esteem.

Once my students realized that I cared about them and began to feel like they were in a safe environment, the learning really began. Some teachers will tell you that you don't have time to do things like this, but you cannot afford NOT to do it. Every great teacher I know uses this strategy and it works.

5. Develop great classroom management techniques.

Students will be less likely to act up and engage in tomfoolery if they know that:

1. their teacher cares for them,
2. they can make an academic mistake without fear of being put down, and
3. they have a history of success in that classroom.

Celebrate every little victory for the whole class. If you've been teaching a new concept and notice that something has finally clicked for your students, tell them how proud of them you are. Personally, I like to take a "victory lap" around the room, slapping high fives as I go. While this particular approach may not be the one for you, even the simplest bit of positive reinforcement will go a long way.

Celebrate every little victory for each individual kid as well. For some, verbal praise will do the trick, while **other students** will appreciate a comment on an assignment, a silent thumbs up, or even just a smile.

On the flip side, be consistent in your consequences. This is by far that hardest thing to do. You will not have a perfect class every day, and there will be times when you will have to deal with misbehavior. No matter who the student is, if you fail to follow through on your own guidelines, you will lose ALL credibility.

Finally, establishing protocols is important for classroom management. Outline a process for everything, and teach them to students on Day One. Whether it's how to enter the room, how to take attendance, how you begin class, how to get materials needed for the day, or how to leave the room, go over the process for each and keep practicing until things are running smoothly. Don't hesitate to revisit protocols throughout the year, especially after breaks.

6. Let your students get to know you.

"Your students have enough friends. What they need is a stable adult presence."

Let your students **get to know** you as a human being, but **always be sure to draw a line in the sand letting them know that you are their teacher, not their friend.** I literally tell that to them: "Listen y'all, I love you and I think you're awesome people, but I am not your friend, I am your teacher." This may be tough for them to hear at first, but they will respect it. Your students have enough friends. What they need is a stable adult presence.

After establishing these boundaries, it's fine to **share** a bit of information about your interests, pets, spouse, or kids. In my classroom, I play a game called "Who is Mr. Edwards" at the beginning of the year. It's a slideshow of multiple choice questions about me, and the kids love it. Their excitement when they get an answer correct is so funny! I also hang up posters that pertain to my interests. My students know that my favorite superhero is Superman and that I love baseball because of the posters on my classroom walls.

7. Don't be afraid to mess up.

Honesty time: your first year will be an incredibly trying time in your career. You may feel that you are an awful teacher (I certainly did), or you may feel like they should be paying the kids and not you. It's okay! Every teacher felt that way their first year and they are lying to you if they say otherwise. It's all about learning from and adapting to situations that can only come from experience. I'm eight years in, and I'm **still** learning tough lessons.

Believe me when I tell you that your first year will be one **giant** tough lesson, but if you seek out those positive people and master teachers I mentioned earlier, they will walk you through it and you will survive. You will come in for year two with much more confidence and better control of your room!

8. Control what you can control, and let the rest go!

You will never be in complete control, because you can't control what happens to your students before, during, or after school. You can only control how safe they feel in your room. You may have students who come in hungry, sad, angry, or all of the above. Remember that they are coming to school as the best they can possibly be that day. Understand that 95% of the time, students are reacting to things that are happening outside of your classroom. Just focus on teaching them as best you can no matter what baggage they bring with them.

Additionally, you cannot control how the school board or government decides they will treat teachers. Sometimes you may feel like a punching bag, or you may find that the local/state/federal budget is being balanced on the backs of teachers. Your job is to keep plugging away for your students.

9. Be organized and lesson plan like your life depends on it.

Kids know when you don't have a plan, and they *will* take advantage of your lack of preparation. Over-plan for every lesson, and ask experienced teachers what they have in their "toolbox" for when there's extra time in a class period or time block. (You can always turn to those team building games!)

Administrators will know if you are unprepared too. As a first year teacher, your lesson plans may under more scrutiny than they will be in later years, and you will most likely be observed more times than other teachers. That's the way it goes. Use those observations as another learning experience and work on developing rich, engaging

lesson plans. TeacherVision is a great resource for creative lesson plans, take advantage of it!

Lastly...

10. Go save the world. Be naive and idealistic.

"Keep trying to reach every kid you can, because when you do, the feeling is indescribable."

You will have some teachers tell you that "You can't save every child," "You shouldn't be so naive," or "You shouldn't be so idealistic." Don't listen to them. Don't let other people's cynicism keep you from trying to do good in this world. Obviously, you should know going into this that you *aren't* going to save every kid, but if we aren't trying, what's the point?

It will be painful when a student you've been working with messes up, but it shouldn't deter you. Keep trying to reach every kid you can, because when you do, the feeling is indescribable. Sometimes the most successful ideas are the most creative or idealistic ones.

You've entered this profession because you have a **passion** for teaching young people, so stay passionate! No matter what anyone tells you, it **is** possible to stay passionate about teaching, even 30 years from now. I know this because I've talked with these passionate veteran teachers. They are the master teachers who remain naive and idealistic in their attempts to reach every child. Emulate these educators, and then you can someday impart these lessons to a first-year teacher.

I will be the first to admit that my first year was something of a trainwreck. While I experienced a lot of success, I experienced so many more failures. However, without those failures, I would never have become the teacher I am today. I needed to experience them, and I still don't have all the answers. After seven years, I still get lost from time to time. As long as you continue learning from your mistakes, your career will be a stellar one!

4 Mistakes New Teachers Make (and How to Avoid Them)

As a **new teacher**, your first year in the classroom can be fraught with doubt and worries: Do I know enough? Are students learning enough? How do I deal with behavior problems? The fear of making a mistake can be overwhelming.



To help you through those early days in the classroom, we asked successful, veteran teachers to share the top four mistakes they made as a new teacher along with their advice for how to avoid these missteps.

New Teacher Mistake #1: Not taking the time to get to know students

Research shows students perform better and have fewer behavioral problems in classrooms where teachers work to connect with them.

Kevin Parr, a fourth-grade teacher for the past 13 years, learned to connect with students early in his career. “One of my biggest mistakes starting out was focusing too much on content and not enough on kids,” explains Parr.

"Often, children are trying to manage a life outside of
school that is unimaginable to many adults."

“The danger in doing this is it can lead teachers into labeling kids for their perceived laziness or disinterest in the material when the root of the problem is factors outside of school. Often, children are trying to manage a life outside of school that is unimaginable to many adults.”

His advice, "**Get to know your students**, and let your students get to know you.”
Parr shares personal stories about his family and childhood, plays games with students at recess, and talks with them about their interests and hobbies.

He says building relationships helps students feel safe and supported and more willing to take risks” which is necessary because, as he explains, Learning is impossible without taking risks.

New Teacher Mistake #2: Failing to set classroom management expectations right away

When you create structure with classroom routines and provide a clear set of rules and expectations, your school day runs smoothly. Students know what to expect as well as what's expected of them.

On her first day as a teacher in 2009, **Amanda Brooks used a PowerPoint presentation to introduce her fifth-grade students to the rules and procedures of her classroom** a process she learned at a pre-school in-service given by Harry Wong, author of *The First Days of School*.

She and her students practiced everything from their morning routine to how to behave when a visitor enters the classroom. Brooks says this one step set the tone for her to have a great year with her students.

Brooks, who now teaches incoming teachers in her district how to manage their classrooms, says **having procedures in place early on helped her focus on teaching and enjoying her career, instead of worrying about behavior issues.**

New Teacher Mistake #3: Forgetting that students need to actively participate in learning

Michael Fisher taught for 13 years before becoming an education consultant in 2008. Early in his first year as a teacher, he realized he was so focused on avoiding behavior problems and keeping students on task that he wasn't involving students in learning.

In an early lesson on potential and kinetic energy, for example, Fisher's students watched a video about roller coasters and completed a worksheet. When tested at the end of the week, half the students failed the test.

"What happened was I didn't teach them anything. They weren't engaged," explains Fisher.

"It was the difference between a ripple in a puddle and a tidal wave. The change was so significant, it underscored the fact that I needed to be a better planner of these discovery-level modelling type moments."

The next year, **Fisher let students construct makeshift roller coasters with clear tubing and weighted balls.** Without mentioning potential and kinetic energy at first, he asked students to test out different scenarios and see what happens when they create a short hill or a high hill and use a metal ball versus a wooden ball.

Fisher says once students were involved, their learning went through the roof. "It was the difference between a ripple in a puddle and a tidal wave. The change was so significant, it underscored the fact that I needed to be a better planner of these discovery-level modelling type moments."

New Teacher Mistake #4: Not taking advantage of online and offline support

Failing to create a professional learning network is a major mistake Fisher sees new teachers make in his role as an education consultant. Whether you use Twitter chats like **#hacklearning**, **Instagram** or blogs (like TeacherVision), Fisher says these tools can provide new teachers with personalized professional development.

Creating connections with colleagues in your school is also helpful. Ask if your school or district has a professional learning community or mentoring program or simply reach out to teachers in your grade-level. Whatever you do, don't try to operate as an island.

As Fisher explains, "I think it's hurtful for teachers to hold themselves up in their rooms and not let anything else in, new experiences, new ways of doing things, new methodologies. If you're not willing to share and give and receive, are you doing what's best for kids?"