

10 WAYS TO SAVE TIME FOR TEACHERS

Adjust your instructional actions and save time with these tips.



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1. Gather evidence of ongoing learning

Implementing the formative assessment process means shifting our thinking about how assessment is used in the classroom from gathering evidence of student learning after instruction to gathering that evidence while learning is occurring.

You can do this by building in opportunities for students to provide evidence of understanding through short, instructional-embedded assessments that are focused on clear learning targets. These evidence-gathering opportunities help students understand what they currently know and can do.

Teachers can also adjust their instructional actions and provide descriptive feedback to students on what they need. Taking the time to ensure that students have learned what was taught allows the teacher to move forward with instruction, saving time typically spent having to reteach later.

2. Prioritise

You can't do everything or not equally well, anyway. One easy way to save time as a teacher is to reduce your workload by focusing on teaching what's most important by using the 40/40/40 rule in teaching.

3. Share the responsibility for learning

This deceptively simple statement has a far-reaching impact and points back to the above. How exactly you accomplish this would be a fantastic topic for a book. Project-based learning, place-based education, 'living' student portfolios of work, and student-led conferences are just a few examples of how this can happen.

4. Empower students

How useful this is and if you can also use collaborators from outside the classroom depends on what grade level you teach, but one of the most important rules in teaching is to never work harder than your students. This isn't easy to pull off and very well may not be a 'simple' way to save time as a teacher, but over the long run can be one of the most powerful.

Assigning students specific tasks, teaching through stations and literature circles, having systems for make-up work and grading, and so on can all go a long way to save you time in the classroom.

5. Clarify learning goals and criteria for success

In the era of the new College and Career-Ready Standards, it is critical that teachers take time to clearly articulate learning expectations that support the content, skills, and processes inherent in the standards. Clarifying learning expectations not only helps teachers focus instructional time on what's important, it helps engage students in learning and understanding the criteria for success.

The instructional process becomes more transparent when success criteria clearly articulate expected performances of understanding and skills. This allows teachers and students to use time more efficiently when interpreting evidence of learning as it unfolds.

6. Rethink the roles of teachers & students

Adding on to #4 above, rethinking the role of teachers of students in the classroom can allow students can pick up foundational knowledge and skills on their own, rather than through large group lectures or other teacher-led instruction. They can do this using online tools or other resources, either within or outside the classroom.

Some activities that are typically considered homework, such as practicing skills introduced in class can move into the classroom. This doesn't mean that teachers should dispense with large group instruction entirely. Variety is the spice of life. However, this approach allows teachers to spend more of their classroom time checking on student understanding in various ways.

7. Involve students in small group work

Another way to save time as a teacher is to share the responsibility of learning is to 'activating students' peers as resources' through small group work.

The delivery of instructional content or facilitating learning through small groups can also be a way of having the students and peers check their understanding against the success criteria.

This allows teachers opportunities to spend their time assisting students who have the greatest need for support.

8. Do not grade everything.

Terry Heick has said this again and again in how to reduce teacher workload, for example: don't grade everything.

Most evidence of learning gathered for formative purposes should not be graded. This evidence is collected during the learning before students have reached the level of attainment they will by the end of a unit. It would be unfair for their early work to be counted toward summative grades. Rather, the early work should be considered preparation for subsequent and fewer summative assessments (another time saver).

When everything is graded, students are motivated by the grades: "I got 80 per cent right; I don't care what I missed. Besides, I can get extra credit for some things I do." Research has shown that over-grading inhibits learning. Of course, the first time students are asked to produce work that is not graded, they may not take the assignment seriously. But when they are reprogrammed to realise that what they're practising will show up later on the test that does count, they soon will develop the motivation to learn, which formative assessment experts assert is critical.

The ungraded work yields rich feedback that students use to reflect on their work and that students and teachers use to identify learning gaps and decide on the next instructional steps.

9. Plan time for students to reflect on learning with feedback

Build time into lesson plans for students to review progress. When students have the opportunity to reflect on their learning and apply feedback to improve their work, they can see their progress and advance their learning.

By giving students major responsibility for their learning, using class time differently, and changing grading practices, teachers can gain time that might be useful. Teachers may not be able to change some practices on their own. Education leaders need to understand formative assessment and support teachers in implementing it effectively to allow teachers to focus their time on their primary goal of helping students learn.

10. Automate

This is obviously not simple, either. How to automate and what to automate, and when to automate in your teaching is a complicated thing. That said, some automation in the classroom is more obvious than others: Taking attendance, self-grading assessments, systems for grouping students and exit slip collection, and more are all low-hanging fruit here. More on this topic soon.

11. Delegate

Don't try to do it all. Being a master only leads to burnout. Use your aides, paras, and even parents to lighten your load. Don't do something for your students that they can do for themselves. Empower your kids to take on the tasks that take up your time. Even younger students can help with organising lesson materials and filing things away. Kids love to organise.

12. Organise your desk

Not all solutions are technology-based. Brother International says two-thirds of us spend at least half an hour each week looking for lost digital items. Letting things pile up on your desk (or digital desktop) is a surefire way to lose things you'll need. Here are a few tips to clear the clutter from your physical desktop.

- Use an inbox/outbox system for daily things that arrive on your desk notes from home, permission slips, whatever.
- Use well-labelled bins or shelves for regular submissions a tray for turning in homework packets, and a tray for completed math assignments, for example. Teach your students how to use the system, and you'll spend a lot less time sorting through stacks of papers.
- When something comes in, put it right away. Don't let things pile up.
- If you don't already have one, get a filing cabinet a big one. Get lots of hanging and manilla folders. Label them well. Your physical file organisation can mirror that of your electronic files.
- Store away larger artefacts or older materials that you aren't using now but may need again in the future. Empty copier paper boxes work well.

Added bonus: Collaborate with other teachers online

Some teachers harness the power of lesson planning sites to save time. Use your PLN to gain ideas, tips, resources, strategies, webinars for teachers, and more.

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