

TeaCher Talk:

Advice for teachers from teachers - Middle School Edition

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Thank you..

If you weren't already aware, the online teaching community is amazing! When I set out on this little project to assist 1st year teachers; my goal was to answer questions, ease nerves, and give some encouragement. To do so, I reached out to the online teaching community through Instagram and was truly overwhelmed by the response! Over 30 first year teachers reached out to contribute and ask questions! Over 30 teachers with more than a combined 170 years of experience stepped up without hesitation to offer assistance, answer questions, and give encouragement. I cannot say thank you enough to those that jumped at the opportunity to help. This project has turned into so much more than I originally thought it could be and I am beyond excited to share it with all of you.

Before we dive into it I want to thank all of the teachers that participated and let you know where to find them in this online teaching community. All of their responses to the given questions will be posted anonymously throughout this series. However, I want you to know where and how to find them online so that you can connect and collaborate with them. Please note that each bullet point denotes an answer from a different teacher and that answers are posted in order of increasing years of experience.

Contributing Teachers

Find them on Instagram:

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or read their blogs:

The Turquoise Teach

Teach.Mom.Repeat.

The Teal Paperclip

Teaching with Behavior

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*All accounts are linked; click on them to be directed to their site.

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**QUESTIONS FROM 1st+
YEAR MIDDLE SCHOOL
TEACHERS:**

The 1st day of SCHOOL...

What do you do on the 1st day of school? What tips do you have for the 1st day or week?

- "One thing that I did a little different on the first day of school than other teachers might do is that I let my students ask me questions. I literally sit myself on the top of a desk/stool (my teacher lab table last year) and let them ask me questions. For the most part, I answered them all. If you don't want to answer certain questions, tell them that you won't answer that. It gives the students the ability to learn more about you (things they actually care to know), learn what your boundaries are when sharing with them, and shows you are a real person. I'll be honest though... the first few minutes can be awkward before the students start to ask questions. "
- I do NOT go over rules & procedures. They're so overloaded with this on the first day. I get to know my kids (they're always so impressed that I can recite all their names by the end of the period) & I do an activity to see what kind of science background they have.
- Get to know your students and let them get to know you on the first day. Give them work that first week so that they get into good habits from the beginning and take you seriously.
- "On the first day of school there is a lot of information to cover related mostly to school and less about my class/subject. After our morning assembly, students receive their schedules and the day begins. I cover school policies, review their planners, dress code, and bell schedule, and answer any of their questions (it's their first day at a new school so they're pretty nervous). Lastly I discuss my classroom's expectations and rules. It is a watered-down version. Don't want to completely overload them!
- The first week of school I focus strictly on classroom expectations, goal setting, and building respect and classroom community. Students need to feel secure in your class if they're going to be receptive to what you're trying to teach them. Laying down that foundation at the very beginning of the year is crucial!

- Typically on the first day of school, I go through a PowerPoint with the students sharing about myself so they get to know who their teacher is a bit more. Also, I usually have some type of active game/ice breaker for the students to play so that I get to know them and they get to know their peers better. One year, I had different stations. I put up different questions on white sheets of large poster paper. The students wrote their answers on different colored post-it notes and we discussed some of their answers. I give students a tour of the classroom and go over a few routines for them of what I expect. Also, I give students a survey about what they like reading and writing. It gives me an idea of how they are coming into my classroom whether they like the subject or not. Lastly, I briefly go over my syllabus and my expectations for the year. I usually have the students write me a letter about themselves. This allows me to see how well they can write and also gives me a chance to get to know them better at the beginning of the year. For the first week of school, it's important to continue going over procedures and routines in the classroom so the students get used to what you expect in your classroom.
- I use stations to get through all of the administrative tasks that the first week of school usually requires: syllabus, procedures, get to know you, writing samples, interest inventory, multiples intelligences etc. This allows kids to get up and move and keeps them engaged by switching tasks every 7-10 minutes. When it comes to the 1st day or week, go ahead and over plan. You'll feel better knowing that you don't have to fill downtime or deal with discipline issues because students aren't busy.
- I always over plan, and that's my big advice—make a checklist in pencil and do what you can. I start with a welcome Google Slideshow with basics of who I am, we do a reading inventory activity, I read aloud a book to build community, and we have days 1, 2 and 3 planned that we have to cover from school wide procedures.
- Just don't read them the syllabus. Set the tone for the rest of your class. Here are some tried and tested ideas <http://eslcarissa.blogspot.com/2017/07/four-fun-ways-to-start-new-school-year.html>
- I used to talk the whole time. Now I run a normal day. Read aloud, mini lesson about a few key procedures, usually my book check in check out (see my Speedbooking lesson on TpT), independent practice with a student survey (which you can get for free when you sign up for my blog newsletter). A "normal" day with some active lessons sets that "we mean business" tone for the year.

DO STUDENTS TYPICALLY HAVE AT LEAST A NOTEBOOK AND PENCIL BY THE FIRST DAY?

- I think this depends on where your school is (demographically & SES). Some of my students don't have a pencil or notebook supplied from home on the first day (or the entire year) and some do. Be prepared with pencils on the first day and I would advise to have all of your first few days of school activity printed out instead of relying on the students to have supplies.
- Yes, but don't expect all students to have supplies. If you are already hired by a school district you may be able to contact your secretary and ask about a supply list. I was able to edit the one previously set up by my team and added some items I would need for class. It all depends on your school district what students bring in. In my district, I see a lot of tissues, pencils, loose leaf, erasers, etc. I did purchase enough materials during back-to-school season, so if one of my students wasn't able to bring in supplies they could have a full desk the next day.
- No. HAVE A STASH OF SUPPLIES!!! Some kids won't have any supplies & I always try to discretely take care of them if they don't have any.
- Totally depends on the demographics of your school, but I taught in high poverty schools and this was typically no.
- It depends. Some will and some won't. If you have really important information for the students on the first day, I suggest printing out guided notes or giving them paper, and offering them a pencil.
- Most students come with most of their supplies on the first day. However, I teach in a low-income rural area. There are times when students come with little to no supplies. I keep a stash of essentials and give students who are without a little paper and something to write with if needed.

- Yes, most students bring at least a notebook and pencil on the first day of school. Most students don't expect to have homework after the first day but they do have an expectation that they will be doing something in class on the first day.
- Some students bring things like this on the first day. Some students don't bring anything on the first day; some students don't bring anything ever. It's easier to just give them a pencil (and get it back at the end of class if you're worried about it) than it is to waste your breath asking why they don't have one and reminding them that they should. Save your time. Honestly.
- Pencil, yes. Notebook, sometimes. I always give them my list of specific supplies they may need for my class.
- Usually the ones who are in need because of money issues have already been taken care of by our guidance counselors. However, I always give the kids a notebook and make a treat bag with pencil, eraser, highlighter and sticky notes.

Lesson planning:

HOW DO YOU PLAN SO THAT YOU HIT ALL OF THE STANDARDS?

- "I like to make a big Excel sheet ""checklist"" with all the standards and a small copy to check off that I have covered it. Make sure to ask your department teachers (those who are also teaching the same subject/grade level) if they have a pacing guide to follow for the year. This way you can see how the standards flow throughout the year. "
- Try to follow the curriculum map if available. Talk to other teachers and see how they pace themselves. Some have a curriculum map and plans that outline when material should be taught.
- Our school system provides curriculum guides which helps. I also review the standards before the start of the school year when I'm planning my year outline.
- To keep track of the standards, I have a chart that I use and I check off when I've hit that standard. Our units are aligned to hit most standards twice in the school year so if I don't go as in depth the first time I'll ensure that I do the next time.
- I plan according to the power standards..what is most essential for my grade and subject.
- Backwards design planning has helped so much.
- After reading Learning in the Fast Lane I've started making concept maps in the way she describes. Your schools should have curriculum maps in place and other department teachers who can help with this to get you started.

HOW DO YOU KEEP LESSONS AND PROJECTS ENGAGING ALL SCHOOL YEAR? (WITHOUT GETTING BURNED OUT AFTER THE FIRST FEW HANDS ON ACTIVITIES)

- Space them out enough to where students are still excited about a project. Sometimes if you do project after project, although engaging and interesting, the students can get "bored" of them.
- Middle school kids don't burn out with hands-on activities!!! Most classes they'll be in are going to be "sit in your seat take notes & be quiet" I love my class to be (what I like to call) organized chaos. You establish your ground rules & expectations right off the bat then you can allow your class to get a little crazy when learning.
- Mix things up! Don't be afraid to use YouTube to help teach a lesson. Use Pinterest and TPT for help making more meaningful activities. If there is independent reading, let the kids sit wherever they want in the room, utilize flexible seating! Go outside when it's nice and do a hands on lesson.
- Spread out your projects and larger activities. This keeps the students engaged and excited about learning all year and keeps you from burning out! Incorporate lots of student lead learning. It helps them to take ownership of their learning and the class. It also helps lighten your load, too.
- Some lessons are best kept simple. Start small and work your way up to more hands on (big projects). If you plan one amazing lesson per week, you'll have a lot of ideas to pull from. Then, your second year, you can plan another amazing plan, and you'll have two big lessons per week. You eat an elephant one bite at a time. :)
- I manage the amount of hands on that I do and balance with something less involved.
- Some lessons aren't as exciting as others... I'm ok with that. You should be too!
- You can't be all things all the time. Sometimes you plan a day that teaches kids how to sustain themselves in quiet, seated work. They do need practice with this option since they will take a test in this way.

Behavior & Classroom Management+

What procedures and rules are "must-haves" in a middle school classroom?

- With middle schoolers, the most important "must have" for me, is respect. From day 1, my "number 1" in the classroom is respect. I respect my students, they respect me. This is extremely important to me as I am only a 2nd year teacher and I look very young. They need to know from the get-go that I deserve respect and that they will get it back. To do this, I actually sit down with them and we talk about what is respectful/disrespectful in the classroom. All students are coming from a different home and the level of respect can be completely different at each place. We set our levels of respect collaboratively (although I do steer them) so that all students know what is expected. It's also important to show them that you respect them. Don't want your students talking while you are? Don't talk while they are. Want them to always use "please & thank you"? Always use please and thank you with them. Lead by example.
- How to enter the classroom, where to find materials, and what to do for the first 10-15 min of class. I ALWAYS had a Do Now on the board. Students would come in, get their notebooks, work silently for 5 min (I had a timer), then they would turn and talk to their peers, and then we would review the question whole group. This was AMAZING for my classroom.
- Technology rules for cell phones, iPads, computers, etc. They will try to get away with whatever they can.
- Expectations of getting into a routine. make sure students know what they are to be doing when they get to class and during non teacher led times
- Be kind and treat others like you would want to be treated! Emotions and drama run wild in middle school, and it is important for the students to remember how their actions impact others. Recognizing emotions in self and others helps to develop their emotional intelligence.

- One of the biggest rules needed in a middle school classroom is respect. Students should respect themselves, their peers and school property. One of the rules in my classroom is that students need to be respectful of one another's property, words, and actions. I try to cultivate a positive encouraging environment so everyone feels welcomed and free to share their opinions. As for procedures, I would think about how you want kids to get your attention and vice versa how you want to get students attention back to focus on you. Other procedures would be beginning and end of the class routine, how do you want papers passed forward/collected, can students get out of their seats to go to the restroom or get a drink of water, sharpening a pencil, etc.
- I use the 5Ps for my rules: Prompt, Polite, Prepared, Productive, and Patient. This is broad enough to cover just about any situation. As far as procedures, if it happens more than once, have a procedure for it: how to start class, how to leave class, what materials to have, how to turn in work, how to pass back work, how to transition, emergency procedures, ...and so on.
- How to enter the room, what to do when you come in (bell work? Sharpen pencils? Independent reading book out?) then, take the time to TEACH them every single boring thing about how exactly you want them to do it.
- Keep it simple. I tie most of my rules back to respect!!
- They need to be told every detail! If you like names in a specific place you'd better tell them. If you want first and last names on papers you'd better tell them. But if you have a poster with that information on it, DON'T tell them the answer. Ask them, where might you find the answer to that question. They need to learn to start advocating for themselves.

HOW DO YOU ENFORCE RULES AND MANAGE BEHAVIOR IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

- "1. Consistency. If you tell a student that they have one more chance, make sure you stick with that last chance. If students are given 3 warnings, don't give them anymore than 3. Stick to what you say and your students will jump on board.

2. Reminders. Start the year by constantly going over your rules and expectations (for longer than you think you have to).

3. Don't sweat the small stuff. Sometimes you have to let the small things go, because otherwise you will constantly be battling the behavior in your classroom. "
- Clear and consistent procedures. I focus on the positives and students doing what they are supposed to be doing. Frequent rewards for desirable behavior. And consistent consequences when procedures aren't followed.
- I treat my students the same as the typical students, but do give them some leeway. When there's a problem, they get written up and have to go to the principal just like anyone else. I try to stick to the school rules as much as I can, but some I bend.
- I try to establish mutual respect with the students as quickly as possible. I set the expectations and enforce them with consistency. This usually eliminates most behavior issues. However, I use a weekly tally system for behavior issues if needed. First warning = name on board, second warning = tally next to name, third warning = another tally + lunch detention/punish work, fourth warning = tally + after school detention + call home, and finally fifth warning = tally + office referral. I believe having the visual of their name on the board helps to keep them in check, and it also helps me with tracking/documenting behavior. The 5 levels for consequences are set by our administrators.

- The motto in my classroom for enforcing rules is to be firm and consistent. Students will walk over you if they know you are making an empty threat and won't follow through on your action. If you say you are giving them a warning then a detention then you need to follow through on that. It's important to remember although you want the kids to like you, you are not there to be their friend. You are their teacher, coach, mentor. They will learn by you disciplining time and teaching them they have to follow the rules. It's better they learn this early on rather than later in life when they are in the real world.
- Never ever yell at or argue with a kid. There's no point; it doesn't accomplish anything. The first time there is an issue, I politely ask the student to stop what they're doing. The second time, I write out a detention slip and show it to them. The third time, I have them sign the detention slip. Anything after that, I send them to the office. (I've been in my current position for five years and have only ever had to send two kids to the office.)
- I take 4 full weeks of school (yes, 4!) and the first 10-15 minutes are spent teaching and reviewing expectations. Then, they have to show me they can do it. Middle schoolers are not as willing to act out things as my elementary students were, but they still need to do it. After that, hopefully the disruptions will be kept to a minimum.
- First day of school if there is a problem, someone wants to be class clown, I call home that day. It's amazing how phone calls the first week lets them know you mean business, and that you care about their education. I once had a teammate tell a boy who told us we pick on him, that it's because we care. When we stop being in your business it means we've given up on you and that's a really bad sign. This has stuck with me!

HOW DO YOU KEEP CHATTY KIDS QUIET AND MOTIVATED?

- Keep them busy! Giving a chatty student the simple task of passing out the papers while you explain directions can keep them quiet and listening as opposed to having to sit quietly and listen. While they are working, I always try to check in on them consistently so that I can monitor their progress and that they are also realizing that they are making/not making progress. "okay you are on #5, when I come back around I hope you have completed 4 more questions." It gives them a goal to stay focused.
- Give them responsibility!!! Speak life to your problem kids. Let them know how important & special they are!! Chances are building that relationship will make them want to be good for you. My favorite kids have been the "problem kids" in other classes on my team!
- Allow structured time for discussion. A class shouldn't be quiet the entire time. You have to allow opportunity for talking and discussion. When you allow this consistently, it helps to cut down on talking out of turn.
- Keep them busy!
- Puts those kids to work! Get them involved with classroom jobs or helping others. If you view this as a skill to be used and groomed, then you can guide the those students and teach them how to use it effectively and with a purpose. Plus a kid who is busy and engaged will hardly ever be a disturbance.
- Some kids like to talk. Give them something productive to talk about. A quiet room isn't necessarily a good room. (Kids are quiet when they're asleep). Student choice and engaging content/presentation keep kids on task. Kids that are on task don't usually present behavioral issues.

- I may have a different stance on this..but chatty doesn't equal bad to me. And quiet doesn't mean they are working hard. I try to only talk/lecture for 15-20 minutes tops in my 75 minute block. Then, I release responsibility to them and they work or collaborate on the activity. If they are then off task talking, we discuss that as needed. Usually I can tell the on task conversations from the other as I walk around and participate in their conversations as well.
- Redirect their chats! Give super specific directions.
- Ask them to share, give them a leadership role, ultimately call home and ask for reinforcements. Give them a chance to talk and maybe they will learn when and when not to talk.

parent contact:

What advice do you have for parent contact?

- "Make positive contact as much as you can therefore when/if you do have to make a negative contact, the parents know that you are on their student's side and care for them to do well. Also, have tangible data and examples to back up everything you are saying."
- Keep lines of communication open with parents. Make sure you listen to their thoughts and concerns and feel free to say to them "I'm going to think about what you said and get back to you." If dealing with a problem regarding their child give them the sandwich. {Compliment, problem, compliment} It helps them not feel like they are being attacked if their child is having problems in school. Remember, that is their baby and if you talk about how horrible they are in school they will be harder to work with!
- LOG EVERYTHING!! Start a notebook & be sure to document all contact!
- Always keep an open line of communication with parents. Encourage them to email you, or call the school, with questions or concerns.
- Throw in lots of positive parent contact! It will make them more receptive to negative contact (if there is any) down the road. If you are unsure about how to answer a parent question or concern, go to your principal and seek advice. Keep them in the loop so they are not surprised later by a parent issue.

- Contact parents early in the year and develop a relationship with them. I would encourage you to contact parents both for positive and negative things that are happening in the classroom. Mailing a postcard home, writing an email or making a phone call about a child's behavior/academic success in the classroom positive and negative will make an impact. Get in a routine of contacting parents early about a student's behavior or missing work so that you can work in partnership to help their child get back on track and succeed in your classroom. Also, I would encourage you to email parents grades biweekly so they know how their child is doing in your class. Lastly, be sure to document your contact with the parent in a parent contact log. This will cover yourself so you know when (time/date) you contacted a parent if an issue should arise later in the year.
- Document everything. I use a contact log and write everything down. It's always best to start off the year with some type of positive contact. It seems intimidating at first, but it really lays the foundation for a good relationship with parents later on. It is totally worth it. I usually just call, introduce myself, tell them that I'm excited to have their student in class, share my prep time and contact info, and tell them that they can contact me if they have any questions or concerns about their student.
- Make positive contact if possible before a negative. Document, document, document everything you can!
- Do it frequently and early. And make an effort not to have it always be negative.
- If you think it could go poorly ask a colleague or administrator to sit in with you. Don't engage in public places! It's ok to say now is not a good time to talk, but call me at school and we can set something up. Keep track of everything. I keep a Google form on my desktop.

organization:

HOW DO YOU STAY ON TOP OF PLANNING AND GRADING?

- "Set aside certain times throughout the week to sit down and plan. Personally, I meet with my department (the other teachers who also teach the same subject/grade) on Thursdays and we look at the next 2 weeks and we set up a possible plan. Therefore I take my planning period on Friday to get all the supplies/copies/notes prepared for the following week. Grading can be overwhelming sometimes, but don't get caught up in it. Yes, the students want their grades quickly, but they can also wait. You are only human. "
- I take everything one day at a time. Over the summer I get things organized —I create binders for all my units I will be teaching so when I find something I might want to use I can easily put it in that unit binder for later. My planner is my best friend! I always try to plan my months but it never quite works out as I plan & that's totally fine!! The important thing is to move at your students pace — learn them & adjust your teaching!
- Peer grading assignments is a great way to stay ahead. As for planning, start early and modify often. Spend time during the summer and weekends planning. It's worth it.
- It's a challenge! Make a routine for yourself and stick to it as best as you possibly can. I TRY to have papers graded and returned the Tuesday after they are turned in. I start the year off with a basic outline for the year and a plan for the first quarter. Every Thursday and Friday I plan for the next week based on my outlines and students' needs.

- "Oh my this is definitely an on-going struggle for me but it's a work in progress. I personally like to plan out by units. For example if the unit is supposed to take 5 weeks I will plan out those 5 weeks to the best of my ability. I like to use post-it notes in my planner and write my plans on those so that I can change them daily if something changes or we don't get as far as I hoped or expected. It's important to backward plan so that you can ensure you get all the tasks done that you want in the specified amount of time. Especially your first year, you may not get through everything you want and that is okay. Each year I noticed I started to get better at planning out my lessons and fit more into my year. If possible at the beginning of the year, I would recommend outlining out the whole year so you have an idea of how long you want to spend on each unit then I would plan more detailed lesson plans on a biweekly basis.

As an English teacher, grading is definitely a kicker. I would encourage you to not feel like you have to grade EVERYTHING. I know in the beginning you have the worry that your students deserve it and that they will remember if you don't grade an assignment. I will tell you from experience, they do indeed forget. I encourage you to grade major assignments like projects, tests, essays. If its a homework assignment, I would create some check, check plus, check minus system so they can receive participation credit but you don't necessarily have to spend forever grading it to see if they understood the concept. Another suggestion I have for you in terms of grading is to not wait until the last minute. Choose one or two days a week when you are going to focus on grading an assignment. Set goals for yourself so you will achieve them. "

- I set aside a specific time and day to do each. I usually plan on Thursdays during my prep period. I grade every other weekend (although some administrators won't allow this.) You need to have a routine to stay on top of it. Decide what works best for you.
- I close my door, cut on music and do it at school. I do a little at a time, if it gets overwhelming, and try to finish 5 then take a break. If I try to take it home, I get distracted by cooking or household projects and miss out on my family time.
- I have toddlers at home, so the time I'm given at school I use it to full potential. Grading, I'm terrible about so if anyone has the answer I'd love to hear it 😊 You just have to be organized about your time and remember you don't have to give a grade for everything they do. Sometimes you just need an idea of what they were thinking.

What do you do for Classroom organization? Resources, digital files, materials, etc.

- I arrange digital files by chapter or unit. I also have binders for resources such as: standards, assessments, master copies, attendance, & parent contact information. I use a 10 drawer cart to keep weekly materials organized. One drawer for each class period, one drawer for each day of the week, and a drawer for ""next week"". This is where I keep copies that I have been made or need to be made.
- Filing cabinets can be your best friend for materials and files. Make folders on your computer for each subject you teach, and then sub folders for each chapter.”
- I keep paper files and digital files. Classroom organization is a work in progress. I find you have to change to meet your needs with each year.
- My first year, I kept a hard copy of everything I gave the students. I would create a binder for each unit and update it from year to year as things changed. Also, I would have a digital copy of each assignment made. I organize my files by year, subject, and topic. After my first year, I no longer kept a copy of multiple assignments in manila folders in my cabinet. I just keep a binder of each unit now and a digital copy of each assignment.
- Trying to switch to electronic, but good old paper and pencil things work best for me.
- Color coding by class.

CO-teaching:

I will be co-teaching this year (too many kids for one teacher not enough space in the school for two separate classrooms) my concern is being treated more like a student teacher than an equal teacher. How do I approach my co-teacher with new ideas and incorporate my own things without upsetting her? How do I gain paraprofessional support - based on my ESY experience they view me as new and not knowing much about anything.

- You need to meet with the other teacher prior to the start of school and discuss how they envision the year to go. Make it known you want to be a part of the teaching process, and find ways to take turns teaching or integrate co-teaching into the lessons.
- I would just sit down with him/her and ask what their expectations are for the co-taught classroom and how they would like to divide the workload. This lets them know that you are expecting to be in control of portions of the classroom whether that be teaching every other day or teaching a specific subject or whatever. If their answer isn't what you wanted to hear, you can politely share what your expectations were. For example, "That sounds great, I just kind of thought that I would get to plan certain portions of the class or that I would get to get some experience planning and implementing some of my ideas."
- Oh this is speaking to me, because I had a teacher's assistant who had been there forever and I came in and she treated me like a child. Have your plan, then approach her like "I've planned to teach this tomorrow." Bring knowledgeable and saying what you're doing instead of asking "what would you like to do?" helped me establish authority.
- Talk about both of your expectations before school starts. I wrote a blog about this from a co-teaching stand point to support IEP students in regular ed classes. I prefer the policy of loving honesty. But if you can discuss your expectations before school starts that could help you both establish a unified relationship.

Other:

How can I not feel overwhelmed with all of the work?

- Take it ONE DAY AT A TIME!! Make check lists!!!
- Keep on top of things, and don't be afraid to take a break.
- Make sure you still take time for other things that you enjoy. Spend time with family and friends on the weekends and let your mind take a break from it all. This work can consume you but remember it's not the only thing you have going on in your life.
- Take time for yourself. You will have long nights at work your first year and that is okay. I would take at least a day or two a week to just do something for yourself so that you don't burn out. Treat yourself and don't feel guilty about it.
- Make a plan, set a schedule, and know your limits. You're never going to be completely through with everything. The sooner you accept that the better. I've written a blog post about setting a schedule and using a routine to divide and conquer. <http://www.thetealpaperclip.com/2015/09/my-sanity-saver.html>
- Make lists. Be okay with not crossing everything off. Stop at a decent hour and come back tomorrow. Don't work too hard on the weekends without recharging yourself.
- We all feel overwhelmed. You do one thing at a time until it's done and move on to the next thing. Prioritize by importance or deadline. Some things just have to wait, until maybe next year.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH COMMENTS FROM PARENTS (AND OTHER TEACHERS) ABOUT BEING A FIRST YEAR TEACHER?

- "The students and parents did not know I was a first year teacher. I don't think it is something that you need to broadcast or tell the parents/students. The other teachers that I worked with were extremely helpful. I was just completely honest with them about not knowing something or needing help with something. I think the honesty led to respect even though I was brand new."
- Let it go in one ear & out the other! Don't take anything anyone says to heart. I always would base how I'm doing off my student's reactions & comments. They're all that really matters!!
- "Don't let the parents tell you how to do your job. It's ok to ask for feedback, but don't let them try to run the room. The same goes for other teachers. Ask for help, and listen to what they say. If they are being pushy or rude, thank them for their comments and let it go."
- Be confident and have a plan going into the school year. This will eliminate a lot of questions and concerns, as well as, prep you to answer those questions. Remember — every teacher was a first year teach at some point. Show them your enthusiasm about starting this new chapter in your life! This builds their confidence in you and less questions will come.
- First of all, I don't let it get to me. I know as a first year teacher your goal is to be liked by everyone including your students. I learned to not take things personal and that I need to just be myself. I can't pretend to be someone I am not. When I was a first year teacher, I did have substitute experience so when I introduced myself to parents I would include that this was my first year teaching at this school but I had experience substitute teaching for however many years as well as working with students in a church setting. Above all, don't take it personal. You are learning and will continue to grow as a professional.

- If they are concerned, I usually just explain to them that I'm working with other experienced teachers in my department to prepare and plan for lessons that suit our students' needs.
- Smile and say "yes, I'm so fresh and excited about my job, isn't that great?" Also, back everything up with standards and the "why" because you will have people who wonder about the reason why you do the things you do. I shut a couple of parents down quickly when I justified my reasoning.
- You have to learn sometime. You're doing your best and it's a learning experience, so next time maybe you'll make a different choice but you had to learn somehow. Show them grace for forgetting what it was like to do something for the first time.

Who do I ask what questions... I know that is vague but, who do I go to to ask where to put materials in my room that I will not use? When can I log in to the school website/grade book? When can I get my class lists and know who is on my sped case load?

- Ask your principal about storage and the SPED caseload. Guidance will have class lists, and should have grade book log in info. Make friends with the secretaries, they are the ones to go to when you don't know who to ask!
- Most of these questions should be directed to an administrator at your school. You can reach out to a fellow teacher that you will be working with as well. If you're lucky, you will have been paired with a mentor teacher who should be able to give you some guidance.
- I would find a co-worker who is willing to answer some of your questions for you so they can steer you in the right direction. This could be someone who is teaching the same grade or subject matter as you. If you don't feel comfortable, I would ask the counselor or even the secretary. As a first year teacher, I was always asking questions to the secretary because I didn't know who the right person was to ask. She was always very helpful and steered me in the right direction.
- If you have questions about your room, content, planning, and etc, ask the teachers in your department. If you have questions about your job responsibilities ask your principal. Questions about passwords/logins/and etc should be directed to the head of your technology department because that is who usually sets up all of your accounts. Class list delivery varies by district, you can usually politely ask another teach in your department first. If they aren't sure, you can ask your counselor (scheduler) or principal. The special ed department will handle your caseload.
- Ask your school secretary for a list of "who does what" in the school. I was new to my school last year and this helped a lot. Also...you can always play the "I'm new here" card for a year if you ask the wrong person ;)
- Your neighboring teachers are a great place to go! I bugged mine sooo much my first year. I also went to the person who hired me. He didn't answer many of my questions but could direct me to who I needed to speak to.
- You should have a mentor teacher, but if they aren't helpful, find someone in your grade in your department. Also, make friends with the secretary for those last few things. I know our building would be in pieces without our secretary!

Does administration expect me to have lots of questions? Who is the best person to talk to within the administration? Should I make a point to talk to my principal about certain things?

- I don't think your admin will expect you to have a lot of questions, but if you have them, don't be afraid to ask! I think you will also just have to see how your administrators are once you get started. I have a pretty close relationship with my head principal and feel that I can ask him any question I might have, but I have heard that other teachers in my school don't feel that way. Once you get to know your admin, you will be able to tell who you feel comfortable asking questions to, I promise!
- To a point they will expect the questions. Talk to the principal about behavioral concerns, and guidance about academics.
- Absolutely! They expect it and make sure you ask! It's good to form a relationship with your principal from the start. It shows them you take this seriously and want to do well. They will appreciate your questions and concern.
- Administration expects you to ask for help when you need it. They're not going to badger you though. Some admin are good about asking you if you have questions, others expect you to speak up if you have concerns. If you have questions or need clarification about something, ask your principal. I find that it's best to be familiar with your principal. This makes it easy to ask for help, share concerns, and get advice.
- Ask questions and don't be intimidated to do so. I think that is what I would tell my first year teacher self the most. A lot of well intentioned people say "let me know if you have questions" and I was too prideful to do that. Don't expect to know it all.
- I've had both kinds of principals, hands on and hands off. It really depends on their personality. I see nothing wrong with asking them questions for the sake of figuring out how they respond. Then you'll know.

How do I share my opinions about curriculum, teaching styles, and classroom management to very experienced teachers (13+ years)? I know most first-years lay low and second-years are more open, but some of the methods my team use aren't as effective as they used to be when they started teaching. I'm worried I'll be too scared to voice my opinions because they're so much more experienced.

- This question is so true to one of my biggest struggles in my first year of teaching. I did my crazy-out-of-the-box lessons, engaging lessons that the kids and administration loved, only to hear the veteran teachers call me a brown noser, fresh blood, and repeatedly say "oh I used to do cool stuff too, you won't when you are like me." You have to be true to yourself and your teaching style. Don't worry about sharing your opinion, just do it respectfully. You are a teacher and have the same amount of right to share your opinion as anyone else. I let myself stress about what other people thought too much my first year and I regret it now. You do you!
- Voice your opinion!!! Don't be known as a push over, but be kind when suggesting. First year teachers have so many awesome ideas!!! Share them!! If your team shuts you down it's your classroom! Do what you think is best, girl!!
- Share what is working in your room with what you are doing. I was in this same position, but my team very quickly learned and they would come to me with questions.
- If you have team time, express yourself then. Offer ideas and suggestions.
- Try putting your opinions in the forms of questions at your team meetings. Provide praise for what they already do well and suggest your opinions as "what if" questions. "What if we did X instead of X?" It will show that you are willing to contribute to the team.
- It always helped me to try it, then share it. If it went really well, say so in an effort to share what helped out. When you have a lesson flop (not if, but when...because it just will happen, and still does to me as I try new things with a new group of kids) ask "wow, that was not the best way. How do you guys teach that?" I also had a special drawer where I smiled and nodded when they would hand me worksheets and then put them in the "special file."

Who should I be best friends with? (Coworkers, School Staff)

- Get to know your custodians!! Having a simple conversation with the custodian that cleans your room after hours can make everything so much easier whether you want to move a full bookcase or need something hung on the wall. Custodians do so much more than you realize and having them on your side/as a friend can make things so much easier!
- You don't have to be best friends with anyone at the school if you don't want to! I would suggest to grow a friendship with teachers with similar minds as you. You want to have a teacher tribe by your side in case you need to vent.
- Be careful who you build friendships with. You absolutely want to be friends with the people you work with, but keep an eye out for school politics etc.
- Custodians, secretaries, lunch ladies, other teachers in your grade and subject area.
- Befriend a veteran teacher for advice and possibly some valuable materials. Be kind to your secretaries and custodians and they will be kind to you.
- I would find a coworker who is teaching the same subject or grade to befriend. My first year I became really close with another teacher because we were both first year teachers and learning things together. She is still one of my best friends to this day. The custodians are great people to get to know. They are very helpful and can help you if you need to move something in your classroom or you need some type of furniture or even need to get in your classroom because you lost your keys. The counselor is another great person to be friends with.
- Get to know the secretary, janitor, food service workers, and technology staff. Schools can be very cliquey. It's usually best to observe for a little while before you jump in head first.
- Treat your custodian well and the cafeteria staff. Then, be REALLY really careful about who you confide in at school. I've been burned by women who seem to be an understanding ear then have what I confided in them spread around.
- POSITIVE PEOPLE! Stay away from the ones who gossip or put people, especially students, down.

What are the first MUST-HAVE buys a 1st year teacher should make (outside of school supplies and decorations)? I'm having so much trouble deciding what to buy for my classroom.

- Don't feel like you need to buy everything before your first year. You will have time to get more stuff throughout your career and ways to get it without paying out of your own pocket. My two must haves: a calendar and a way to organize your planning materials. You will have so many meetings, phone calls, events, and important dates thrown at you, find a way to keep it organized so you don't forget. Also, find a way that works for YOU to organize your materials and lessons for the week.
- Computer chair that is comfortable! Beanbag chairs and any other type of flexible seating. Storage bins!
- A USB drive or external hard drive is a MUST! Always back up your lessons and other materials. I have also found that one of my favorites classroom items is my podium! I can move it around the room and not feel like I have to stay near my desk where my lessons, print-outs, and other tools are located.
- Candy for your drawer, when you need a pick me up. Picture frames to put a few pictures up of your loved ones.
- Don't buy anything until you're in your classroom and you see what the school provides.
- Books.

Should I have a theme in my class or are the kids too old for that?

- It's totally up to you! I have seen middle school rooms with a theme look amazing and the students love them! But also don't think they are necessary. I like to just have a color theme so that my room looks nice and put together.
- A theme is fine if it is age appropriate. I don't have a theme but worked to have a more modern looking classroom. I used black and neon colors and the kids loved it. It wasn't too much, and it worked for all genders, so keep in mind your students before you go for a theme.
- Decorate to your hearts desire. Some kids will really appreciate it while others won't care.
- Do what you suits you! This is your home away from home and if you feel good in the space, the students will, too. Students usually appreciate all decorating efforts even if it is a little "baby-ish."
- YES! Students are not too old for themes. I don't have a particular theme in my classroom but I have a color scheme that I stick with. I would choose a theme like Harry Potter or something that they would enjoy and latch onto.
- I don't have a topic theme, but I choose a color theme to keep my classroom decor cohesive.
- Middle schoolers are just bigger kids, and they want a room to be inviting. I don't see the need to spend 100 hours on my classroom like a lot of people, though.
- If you like it and embrace it they will appreciate your effort. Keep it mature (probably not minions)
- That's totally up to you. I'm pretty sure there's no research that says a thematic classroom decor provides a richer education. If it brings out your personality and makes you happy without stressing you out do it. If it's stressful do a little this year and build on it. Or let the kids do it for you. PROJECT!

Thank you so much for reading! Whether you are a first, fifth, or twenty-fifth year teacher I hope you found this information valuable and that you are able to adapt the advice given here to meet the needs of the students in your classroom.

First year teachers, I am so excited for you to start this journey into the field of education. Your first year will be a roller coaster. There will be good days and bad days but remember why you decided to be a teacher; shake off the bad days and cherish the good days. Know that I'm cheering for you!

If you aren't a first year teacher I hope you learn, grow, and were encouraged as you read through this wealth of information. Be sure to take time to reflect on your own teaching experience and think of ways to incorporate what you've read. As teachers we should always be learning.

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