



New Teacher Toolkit: Resources for Your First Years in the Classroom

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What's In This Toolkit?

Introduction	3
First Days of School	4
Downloadables:	
New Teacher Survival Kit: A Checklist of Essentials	5
First Days To-Do List for New Teachers	6
Back-to-School Welcome Letters	7
Setting Up Your Classroom	10
Downloadables:	
Classroom Design Checklist	14
Establishing Classroom Culture	15
Downloadables:	
Classroom Community Menu	17
How Well Do I Know My Students?	18
Classroom Management	19
Downloadables:	
Classroom Management Plan	23
Classroom Communication	24
Downloadables:	
Sample Script for Parent Phone Calls	29
A Teacher's Cheat Sheet for Social Media	31
Notes for Substitute Teacher	33
Tips for Lesson Planning	35
Downloadables:	
Lesson Plan Template	38

Introduction

Congratulations on embarking on a remarkable journey as a teacher.

The initial years in the classroom can be both thrilling and challenging, and we understand that you might be feeling a mix of excitement and apprehension. But worry not! This New Teacher Toolkit is here to provide you with a wealth of invaluable resources, expert insights, and tried-and-true advice from seasoned educators. Within these pages, you will find an array of downloadables, free resources, and a treasure trove of wisdom that will empower you to navigate the exciting world of education with confidence and grace. So, let's dive in and unlock the keys to your teaching triumphs!



About Teaching Channel

Teaching Channel is a trusted partner and one-stop shop for teacher learning and development. From graduate-level courses and professional development programs, to our innovative video platform for self-reflection, coaching and exemplar videos, we are committed to providing engaging learning, positively impacting student achievement, and preparing educators for a lifetime of success

First Days of School

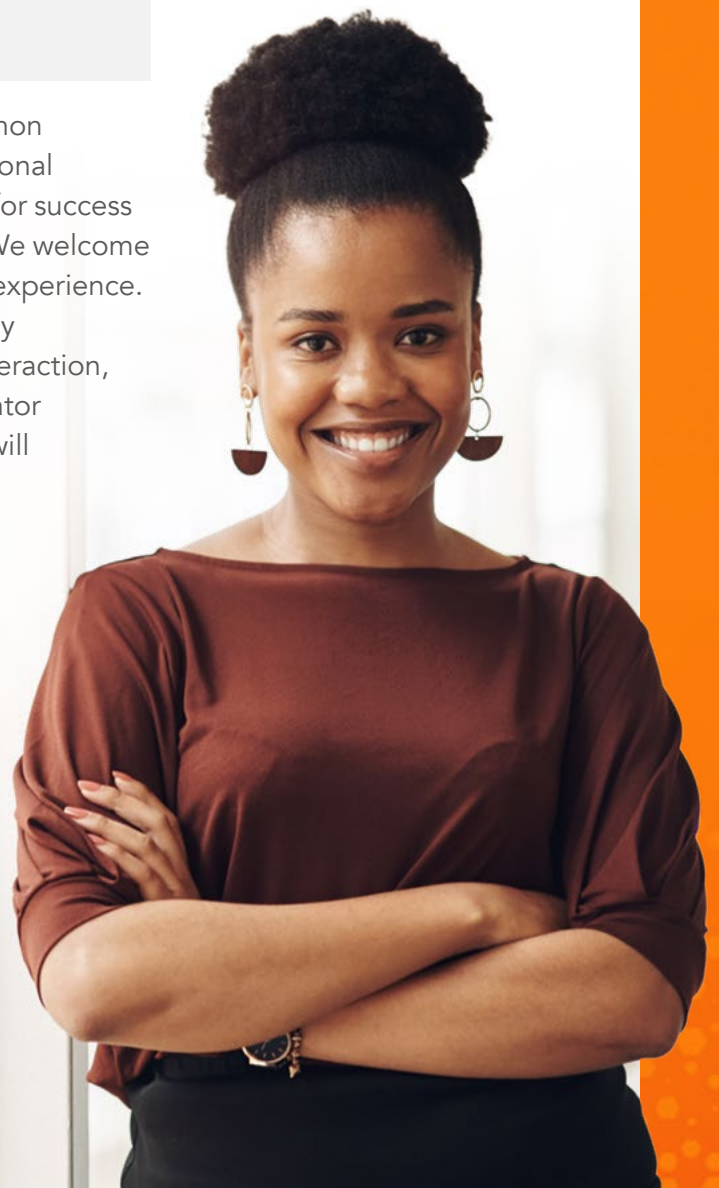
As the summer days fade, we start to anticipate the buzz of hallways filled with eager learners and the fresh start that awaits us all. In this section, we have curated a treasure trove of resources, information, and downloadables to help you kickstart the school year with confidence and create a warm and inviting classroom environment. From organizing your classroom to planning engaging activities for the first few weeks, we have you covered. Get ready to greet your students with open arms and set the stage for a successful and memorable academic journey together. Let's embark on this back-to-school adventure and make it a truly exceptional experience for both you and your students!

Ready to Gain Confidence in the Classroom?

EQUIP for New Teachers is a 10-month program that includes a year of access to the course itself and the Teaching Channel Video Library.

It is focused on supporting new teachers through common challenges as they move from preparation into professional practice. Our long-term goal is to set new teachers up for success early in the profession in a way that will last a lifetime. We welcome new(er) teachers with zero to five years of professional experience. Participants will discover best practices through monthly asynchronous modules packed with resources, peer interaction, and subject-specific microlearning modules with facilitator feedback on each submitted assignment. Participants will have access to on-demand webinars featuring their seasoned facilitator and a guest mentor or speaker with new teacher solutions to common challenges. The EQUIP Program Facilitator serves as a resource to address any questions you have throughout your enrollment.

—→ [Learn More About the EQUIP for New Teachers Program](#)



New Teacher Survival Kit: A Checklist of Essentials

This double checklist of items ensures your own self-care during the school day, but it also takes into consideration items that may be necessary to keep your students learning.

For the Teacher:

- Snacks**
High-protein items are great for a quick breakfast. Fresh fruit provides a healthy pick-me-up after student dismissal. It's hard to teach when you are hungry.
- Hand Sanitizer, Gloves, and Wipes**
Keep yourself healthy and safe. Sick children, spills, and accidents happen, so it is best to be prepared.
- Travel Mug**
While this might seem unnecessary, you'll be glad you have it mid-afternoon when you need a pick-me-up.
- Classroom Decor**
What can you bring into your classroom to make it welcoming to each student? Bring items like photos, souvenirs, etc. for your desk so your students get to know you.
- Desk Drawer Lunch Options**
There will be days you forget your lunch or can't bring yourself to eat another tray of cafeteria food. Keep a few non-perishables in your desk drawer. Protein shakes are portable! Yummy soup can warm you up on a cold day, and yet, another use for your travel mug.

For the Student:

- Snacks**
Granola bars, cereal, and crackers are handy when a student has missed breakfast. It's hard to learn when you are hungry.
 - First Aid Items**
Band-aids and a classroom ice pack can help address minor student needs and keep them in the classroom for learning.
 - Labeled Water Bottles**
Hydration is important for our bodies and our brains specifically. Help your learners start a healthy habit.
 - Learning Materials**
It's important to have a store of common materials (scissors, markers, etc.). Make certain they are organized and accessible to all learners. Bins, baskets, and labels can help!
 - Books**
Every classroom library should include a variety of reading materials. Books with diversity of race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, culture, and family composition can provide a sense of belonging for all students and can help develop awareness, empathy, and compassion for others.
-

First Days of School To-Do List for New Teachers

As a new teacher, these first weeks of school can feel overwhelming, but with careful planning and preparation, you can set a solid foundation for a successful academic journey. This checklist will guide you through essential tasks, from establishing routines and procedures to creating engaging lesson plans and building positive relationships with your students. With each item you check off, you'll gain the confidence and peace of mind needed to navigate this exciting chapter of your teaching career.

- Introduce yourself to families via email, letter, or phone call before school starts.
- Choose family communication methods and proactively schedule and prepare them to be sent on a regular basis. This is a great thing to set reminders for on your calendar.
- Decorate and arrange your classroom for learning. Remember, sometimes less is more. A calming, organized space can be quite effective, so be careful of clutter, even on the walls.
- Develop a classroom schedule for the first few weeks. Draft lesson plans and choose activities that will build trust and create a positive classroom culture.
- Make connections with your students. Spend time building relationships.
- Encourage exploration and guided discovery of the learning space. Maybe a scavenger hunt for materials or free time to look around.
- Get procedures and routines going. Be sure to teach them explicitly and practice them regularly.
- Write a classroom agreement, norms, etc.
- Bring joy! Try to plan something fun every day. Your happiness will be contagious.
- Drink water and encourage students to stay hydrated as well. It's good for our brains and the rest of our bodies.
- Eat well during these first few days and weeks. High-protein breakfasts and snacks can keep you going.
- Exercise. Make time to move your body. It will improve your immune system, increase positive brain chemicals, and provide a break from stress.
- Keep good sleep hygiene. Consider leaving your cell phone or other devices in the kitchen to charge when you go to bed. Never feel guilty for taking a weekend nap.
- Think ahead to household and personal responsibilities and tasks that will come up during these first few weeks. Be proactive and take care of as many of these as you can or build them into your calendar ahead of time.
- Set boundaries so you can achieve balance between work and home life. While an extra hour or two a week is understandable this early in the year, you shouldn't be spending every waking hour working.
- What else should you add to your to-do list?



Back-to-School Welcome Letters

As a new teacher, one of the most vital aspects of establishing a thriving classroom community is forging strong connections with your students and their families from day one.

The following communication templates will help you craft heartfelt and engaging letters to both caregivers and students. These letters will not only convey your enthusiasm for the upcoming school year but also set the foundation for open lines of communication, trust, and collaboration. By using these templates as a starting point, you will be able to personalize your messages, infuse them with your unique style, and create an environment of excitement and inclusivity. Get ready to lay the groundwork for a harmonious partnership between home and school, where students feel supported, inspired, and eager to embark on a transformative learning journey.

Example: Back-to-School Student Letter

.....

Dear [Student Name]:

Back-to-school time is here already. Aren't you excited? I've been planning for our class all summer! Our first few days together will be filled with fun get-to-know-you activities, collaborative culture building, and some new learning, too. The principal has a special event planned, and we will even get a visit from a very special furry friend.

On the first day of school, please bring your supplies and one item you can share with classmates so they learn something new about you. Your chosen item must fit in a backpack. I can't wait to see what you bring.

With the remaining days of summer, please play outside, spend quality time with friends and family, and enjoy a treat, or two, in the sunshine. I can't wait "for our learning adventure to begin!

Your teacher,
Ms. Winter

.....



Example: Back-to-School Parent/Family Member Letter

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Dear [Parent/Guardian Name(s)]:

Hello, my name is Ms. Winter, and I wanted to introduce myself to you. I have been teaching elementary school for two years here. The best part of my job is being able to interact with students all day. You are a special person in your student's life and know them best. I would love to hear about your student from your perspective. What would you like me to know? Please complete this survey to share more.

Volunteers are welcome in our classroom. Check our classroom website to see open opportunities, and please email to share thoughts about how you can share your gifts, strengths, and assets with our class.

Each week, you will receive an email newsletter to tell you about the past week and to share upcoming topics, events, etc. Individual progress reports will be sent home each month. We have conferences in October and March, but I am always open to communicating or meeting with your student and you.

Please visit the classroom during the Open House scheduled for Thursday, August 22 at 4 PM. I can't wait to meet you!

Respectfully,
Ms. Winter

.....

Setting Up Your Classroom



Purge and Clean: Which Areas Need the Most Attention?

It's time to get ready for the new school year. But where do you begin? Whether you're coming back to your old classroom or entering a new one, start by looking at the room with new eyes. Take a walk to notice the state of the environment and think about which areas need purging and cleaning. Before you can set up for this year, try to get rid of anything you don't need. And remember to save some of your cleaning supplies for when your students arrive. You often need a stash of air freshener in a middle school classroom!

Have trouble letting go of some things? Check out [this post](#) by Eat. Write. Teach. to learn how to use the KonMari method in your classroom.

Room Layout: How Will You Design Your Classroom?

Now that your classroom is clean, it's time to envision how you'd like it to be. Think about how you'll set up student desks, your desk, student materials, books, teacher resources, etc. In addition, consider where the main walkways will be and how traffic will flow around your classroom. Consider drawing a sketch of your classroom or even using paper cutouts to see what it would look like to move around different components of your room. Browse images of other teachers' classrooms, and even tour your own school building to see what your colleagues are up to.

Think about creating a space that matches your [ideal class culture](#).



Desk Arrangement: How Can Your Seating Arrangement Reflect How You Want Students to Interact?

You've got a general idea of your classroom layout, so now it's time to turn your attention to desks or tables. In what formation will your students sit? Think about how your desk arrangements can encourage the type of learning you're hoping to facilitate. If you'd like students to learn to work in small groups, for example, consider seating them in groups of four.

Watch this video to see how one high school teacher set up desks to encourage collaboration.

Organize Your Library: How Can You Arrange Books for Easy Access and Readability?

Reading happens across all subject areas, so whether you teach history, science, or math, your classroom most likely has some sort of library. How can you make books look appealing and create a system where they're easy to find? How will you address and invite different reading levels? Do you have a reference collection? Will you have an area where they can sit and read? Even middle and high schoolers love reading nooks!

Don't have a classroom library? **Read Pernille Ripp's blog post** about building one and why they're important, even in middle school classrooms.

What routines can you put into place to help your classroom stay organized?



**Organize Materials:
How Can You Make
Materials Easy to Find
and Use?**

You need so much stuff to make a classroom run smoothly. Most classrooms need art supplies, like markers, scissors, and paper. Depending on the subject you teach, you may need simple calculators or extensive laboratory supplies. And what about tech supplies, like laptops or iPads? Where do you put them all? It can seem overwhelming. But thinking through where materials will go can save you future headaches.

**Think About Systems:
How Can Systems Help
You Stay Organized?**

Now that you know where the materials in your classroom will go, it's time to think about how students will interact with them. Think about how you will hand out materials, how you will collect homework, and how students will move around the classroom. What routines can you put into place to help your classroom stay organized?



Set Up Your Work Area: How Can You Make the Most of Your Work Time?

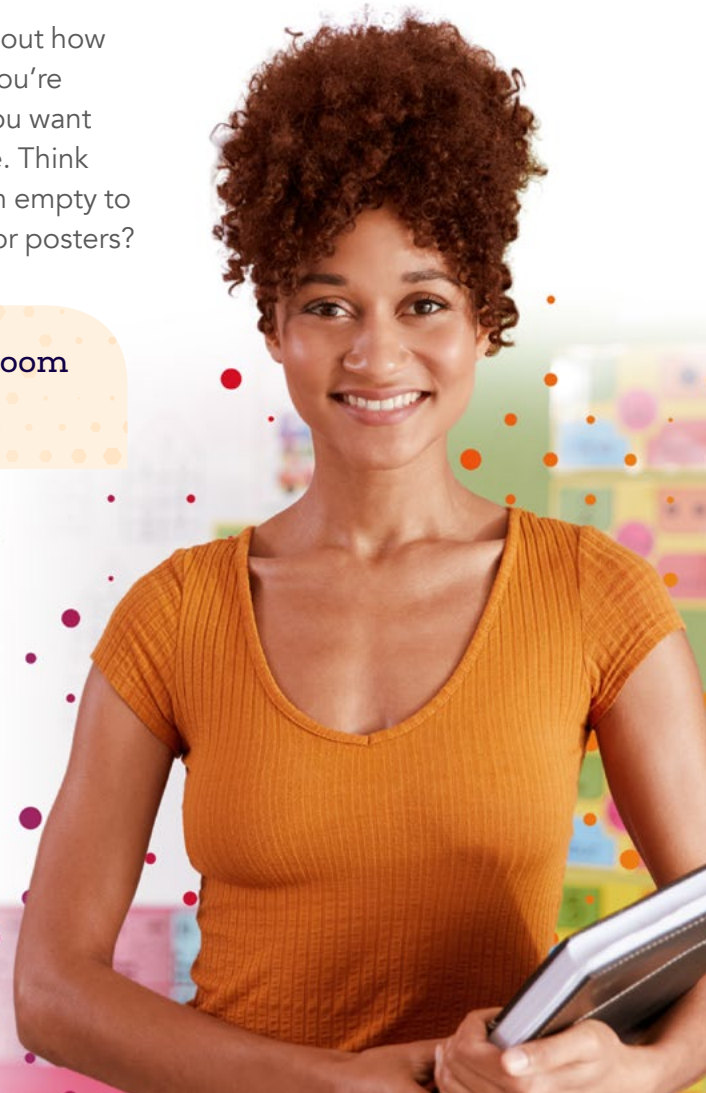
Once you've made a plan for student materials, it's time to attack all the materials that you'll need. What kind of file system will you use? Or will you be paperless? How will you keep track of student work? Think about arranging your work area to help your work time be as productive as possible.

Create less clutter at your desk by going digital. **Watch** how one teacher does just that.

Decorate: How Can You Make Your Classroom Inviting?

Here comes the fun part: decorating! Think about how to make your classroom a welcoming space. You're going to be spending a lot of time there, so you want to make your room as comfortable as it can be. Think about how to use the walls: will you keep them empty to fill with student work or will you post pictures or posters?

See how one teacher uses her classroom walls as a teaching tool.



Classroom Design Checklist

A well-designed classroom sets the stage for student engagement, collaboration, and success. This comprehensive checklist will guide you through the process of designing and laying out your classroom with intention. From optimizing space utilization to creating designated learning zones, this checklist will help you create a classroom that fosters a sense of belonging, creativity, and academic growth.

- Do you have a place for large group meetings?
- Are your tables and/or desks arranged to facilitate small group interaction?
- Does your learning environment include multiple areas with different seating options for independent work?
- Have you provided a space for students to take a break?
- Can students get the materials they need on a regular basis?
- Do you have an area to have a private conference with a student?
- Is your “teacher area” clearly defined?
- Can your students see themselves in the classroom decor, materials, curriculum, etc.?
- Are supplies and materials organized?
- Is the classroom free of clutter including classroom wall decor?
- Is the wall decor you have purposeful?
- How does your classroom represent you?
- How does your classroom represent each student and the group as a whole?
- Are expectations, routines, procedures, and safety reminders clearly posted?
- Does your classroom include a diverse classroom library?
- Does your library include a variety of reading material?

Establishing Classroom Culture



Reflect and Envision: How Do You See Your Classroom?

Before you can even think about how you'll build your class culture, you need to imagine it. If you're a new teacher, think about everything you've seen and read so far. Whose classrooms would you like to emulate? If you already have classroom experience, think about the previous year. What did you like about the culture you built with your students? What would you change? As you're thinking about these ideas, write them down. You'll later be co-creating goals with your students, but it's important to start with your own goals.

Listen to Sarah Brown Wessling discuss how she thinks about class culture at the start of school.

Pick a Focus: Is There an Area You Want to Explore More Deeply?

Now that you have a vision of your class culture in mind, think about an area you'd like to explore more deeply this year. Is there something specific about class culture you'd like to get better at? Or is there a focus you feel your students might really need? For instance, perhaps you'd really like to help your students develop growth mindsets. Or, maybe you would like to focus more on social-emotional learning this year. Explore some areas of focus, pick one, and start to plan out how you'll work on related goals.

Is there something specific about class culture you'd like to get better at?

Think About Norms: What Practices and Routines Do You Imagine for Your Classroom?

Before you can even think about how you'll build your class culture, you need to imagine it. If you're a new teacher, think about everything you've seen and read so far. Whose classrooms would you like to emulate? If you already have classroom experience, think about the previous year. What did you like about the culture you built with your students? What would you change? As you're thinking about these ideas, write them down. You'll later be co-creating goals with your students, but it's important to start with your own goals.

Think about classroom culture as part of your management strategy in the blog [Classroom Culture vs. Classroom Management](#).

Think About Family Communication: How Will You Share Your Class Culture with Families?

It's important to make sure your students' families understand the culture you're trying to build in your classroom so that they can continue the work at home. To ensure consistency between home and school, develop a strong two-way communication plan. How will you present class culture at Back-to-School Night? How will you continue to communicate throughout the year? What inclusive methods of communication can you establish that ensure all families/caregivers feel connected and informed? Will you use a class website, newsletter, or an app?

Plan Class Culture Building for the First Two Weeks: How Will You Use the First Two Weeks of School to Build Culture?

While you may feel an urgency to get to your content curriculum right away, time spent building class culture in the first two weeks of school will end up allowing for more instructional time in the long run. A strong class culture can prevent unproductive behavior and makes deep learning possible! So make sure to infuse a number of relationship and team-building activities early in the school year.

Start planning how you'll communicate class culture with [these tips on structuring your Back-to-School event](#).

To ensure consistency between home and school, develop a strong two-way communication plan.

Classroom Community Menu

Choose one or more items from each section as you create a classroom family/community from your diverse group of students. These strategies work for all classrooms whether the students are primary age, upper elementary, middle school or high school, with you all day long or only for one class period.

Appetizer Aspects to Start the Year Off Right:

- Use the terms learners, scientists, mathematicians, writers, friends, instead of 'guys' or 'boys and girls' when referring to the students.
 - Include your class in developing the classroom norms and rules.
 - Lead a discussion about the meaning of community, and then, relate it to the classroom you make up together.
 - Learn about student peer preferences for group work using a [sociogram](#). Repeat the sociogram activity after several weeks or each grading period since student relationships can change frequently.
 - Ask each student to complete a notecard with their name and What I Wish My Teacher Knew About Me (interests, concerns about a subject, learning preference, fears at school or home, etc.)
- Create classroom jobs that students hold which are needed to create a functioning community. Jobs rotate every week or every two weeks. Jobs may include technology technicians, librarians, lunch basket carriers, paper passers, line leaders, floor/desk checkers, group recorders, etc.
 - Set weekly goals with the students for academics, behavior, etc. and a small reward for its accomplishment. Each weekly goal should be something to stretch the students beyond what they can already do as a group.

Dessert That Adds the Frosting to Your Classroom:

Main Course Features That Supply Heavy Duty Advantages:

- Hold daily class meetings either first thing in the morning or after recess to air student concerns, share plans, and build relationships.
 - Make time to have lunch with students whom you don't know well or who are struggling academically or behaviorally.
 - Greet each student at the door by name when they arrive at your classroom.
- Create a padlet or other online or paper-based means of sharing student suggestions for books to read, book reviews, etc.
 - Take anonymous periodic surveys of your students using Google surveys or notecards asking specific questions about classroom atmosphere, lesson clarity, relationships, etc.
 - Build a bulletin board featuring a different student/s each week with the student sharing home/family pictures, favorite activities/foods, dreams, etc. Discuss with the class how to respond respectfully with their comments to the student. A weekly trivia question based on the bulletin board will help to encourage careful reading and getting to know peers.
 - Celebrate different traditions and holidays of the students in your classroom. Invite community members to share, in person or virtually, about the tradition, its purpose, special activities, and preparation for it.

Customize this template with your relationship-building goals!

How Well Do I Know My Students?

Use this table to see which students you know fairly well and which ones may be in need of relationship building. Mark the box when you can answer the question for each student.

Student Name:						
I recognize the student by sight without using the seating chart.	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
I can tell the parent why the student is succeeding in my class or struggling.						
I can relate the student's favorite activity, gleaned through writings and conversations.						
I have shared positive info with the family in the past two weeks.						
I know a personal anecdote shared by the student with me or the class/group.						
I know the student's dreams, hopes, and plans based on sharing by the student.						
I have used materials, this year, based on this student's background, culture, race, etc.						

Classroom Management

Create a Positive Culture of Belonging in the Classroom.

Begin your day with students by greeting them at the door. Choose from our list of greeting activities or make up your own like an individualized handshake for each learner. Kids like to see your personality, and this is an excellent time to show it. You want them to know you are happy to be there and are happy to see them in class.

Fun Greetings

- Individualize handshakes, fist bumps, or give each student an air high-five.
- Sing each student's name as they come through the door.
- If you don't know their names, ask their name, and see if they know how they got their name.
- Ask students to say their names and then share one good thing that has happened recently for them.
- Let students share their favorites with you. Favorite color? Favorite food? Favorite vacation destination?
- Ask each student to introduce the next student at the door. Make conversation as you wait for kids to filter in.



One of the best strategies you can use to have a successful day with students is to meet and greet them at the door.

Relationship Building

Another strategy for success is to spend time building relationships with your learners. When students feel connected to their peers and teacher, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and ready to work towards your high expectations. Be sure to build in time for “get-to-know-you” activities and even infuse opportunities for connection in your routines and lessons.

All About My Teacher: Create a document listing true and false statements about you and play a game of Red Light-Green Light with your learners. Start by having students line up at

the back of a room, gym, etc. Read one of your statements. If they think the statement is true, they'll step forward. If they think it's false, they stay put. If they get it wrong—they go back to the beginning line! First one across the classroom wins.

Present Your Best Self: Create a quick slide deck presentation or video to share with your students at the beginning of the class. Include pictures, favorites, etc. that tell students more about you.

Another Scoop: If you have identified a learner who may not build relationships easily or who may, in fact, challenge you, take a little extra time with him or her and give an additional scoop of positive attention.

Artifact Sharing: Bring an item that is important to you (something interesting, of course) to share with your students. Introduce yourself and share the story of the artifact you brought with you.

Grab-n-Go: Check out these amazing [templates for building classroom community](#). We love the Play Doh Challenge.

People Bingo: Use a blank bingo board you've filled with characteristics (examples: loves to fish, has 2 cats, favorite color is red, etc.) to encourage the class (including you) to mingle about the room and find individuals to sign their bingo boards.

Transition Activities

Reorienting students from one subject or activity to another can be challenging. Beyond shutting the lights off, clapping your hands twice, or using a non-verbal cue like a chime, you can transition your learners using the strategies below.

Positive Self Talk: Provide students with a list of positive affirmations. As you transition from one activity or topic to another, ask students to repeat one or two positive affirmations to themselves. If you are teaching online, have them mute, stop sharing video, and repeat their affirmations, but be sure to let them know when they should "return to class".

Read Aloud: Choose a picture book or novel to transition your class from subject to subject. Students of all ages enjoy being read to (even though teens may not admit it).

Breathing: [Simple breathing exercises](#) can be modeled for your students and then practiced as well. Learning how to breathe through stress and into calm is a great life-long strategy we all need. Breathing can (and should!) take place in person or virtually.



Mindfulness: Teaching students to regulate their bodies is important. [Most mindfulness activities](#) make for great transitions and can be used virtually as well.

Journaling: Have students jot down their thoughts about a [quote](#) or provide them with a reflection question after a lesson. Better yet, use the great prompts in this downloadable from the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation, "[Make Kindness the Norm](#)"! For a virtual activity, have students respond using [Flip](#).

Movement: Students need to move to release energy (especially online learners) and be physically healthy especially with the increased screen time they are experiencing. Try using some of the activities from "[20 Ways to Get Your Students Moving More](#)" as a transition from one lesson to another.

Videos: Use any short video as a transition (or even a starter)! Take a look at Go Noodle's "[Take on the Day](#)" video for a great morning transition to school or "[Bring It Down](#)" for when you need to calm the energy of your excited, energetic learners.

Stress Snowballs: Ask students to write their stressors down on paper, share out to the class as they feel comfortable and then crumple their paper into a "snowball". Of course, they then must throw their stress snowball away! Look at how one teacher does this in person: "[60 Second Strategy: Snowball Toss](#)" via Edutopia.

Create a Consensus Around Behavior for the Day or Class Period.

Work with students to identify a classroom goal for the day or class period. Having a focused and shared goal will create student buy-in and provide a reminder or cue as needed when behaviors crop up. (Examples include: meet the learning targets of the math lesson, complete a reflection activity, learn something new and have fun!)

Using the class goal, identify, with the learners, prosocial behaviors that will help them meet the class goal by working together. Ask students what behavior should look like and sound like. Document their responses and post it where students and you can refer to it.

Create Responses to Positive and Challenging Behaviors Prior to Them Occurring.

Choose a method to recognize positive behaviors as they are displayed by the learners. (Examples include providing specific praise tied to a value or use of a positive reinforcement ticket to be entered into a class drawing at the end for a small prize.)

When behavior challenges occur, and they will, be consistent and remain calm, cool, and collected. Review, Increasing Student Compliance, for additional tips on helping students follow directions and then document how you will respond in this section's Classroom Management Plan.

Important note: If you have a student with a 504 plan or an Individualized Education Plan and/or Positive Behavior Support Plan, it is imperative that you follow that student's plan to the best of your ability. If the student is struggling and your efforts are not working, contact the teacher assigned to the student as case manager or the administrator in the building.

Celebration Method:

Want to customize your classroom management plan? Use our **free template!**



End Class or the School Day on a Positive Note.

Celebrate with your students if their prosocial behavior has allowed you, as a classroom, to meet the goal you set forth at the beginning of the day or class period. This might be a 30-second dance party or a round of applause. Be sure to thank the students for their good behavior.

Classroom Management Plan

After reading the Classroom Management section of this toolkit, use the focus areas discussed to put together your Classroom Management Plan.

Greeting method:

Transition activities:

Relationship building activity:

Positive behavior identification:

What does positive behavior look like?

(Example: Helping your peers or the teacher.)

What does positive behavior sound like?

(Example: Using helpful words.)

Positive behavior reinforcement method:

Response plan for initial behavior challenge:

Response plan for repeated behavior challenge:

Response plan for significant behaviors disrupting the learning of others:

Response plan for severe behaviors endangering self or others:

Classroom Communication

Communication is the key to a successful classroom environment. Whether it's with your students, their caregiver, a substitute teacher, or another faculty member at your school, having strong communication channels will help make your life easier and help strengthen a positive classroom culture.

Teacher-parent communication is an area that most new teachers feel the least prepared for when entering the profession of teaching. With immediate access to information via technology and social media, many caregivers have increased opportunities to be more informed about their child's education. As such, it is important that teachers work to ensure communication is inclusive, constructive, clear, and designed to promote a partnership established with mutual trust and respect.

Tips to Help You Build Positive Parent Partnerships.

Lead With Your Ears

Take time to process messages, both spoken and unspoken. Use active listening to reduce misunderstandings and send the message that you “hear” what is being said. Restate, paraphrase, and ask probing questions. Caregivers can get emotionally charged; remember, they have a lot at stake — the education of their child. Sometimes, caregivers need to vent and feel validated just like us. You are on the same side and share common goals for educating the student. Find that common ground and keep the student at the center of communication.

Ask

Ask questions, such as:

- “What strengths and interests does your child have?”
- “Is there anything else you want me to know?”
- “Do you have anything else that you are concerned about?”
- “What is bothering you the most?”
- “What are your learning goals for your child?”



These questions help a parent feel you care and that their feelings and viewpoint are valued. caregivers may need validation and support to partner around learning for their child. They may need someone who can remind them of past progress and little wins to celebrate. They may just want to share with someone who understands what they are going through and how they feel. Ask probing questions to get to the heart of the matter, so you can respond in a way that meets the need.

Problem Solve

When working through those challenging conversations, be sure to end with ideas for solutions and a plan for action. Some great questions to end with include: “What are some next steps for us that would make sense?” “Would it help if I (insert action item here)?” Be sure to lay out a plan for follow up including how and when you will follow up. It is best to offer suggestions rather than leave it open-ended so all stakeholders have clarity. Remember to write down the action items so that you don’t forget them, and then, follow through.

Bring Caregivers Into the School. Get Them Involved!

During the year, provide several opportunities where you invite the caregivers in to celebrate their child. Have a potluck where the caregivers are invited to bring in a traditional dish from their heritage, invite them to sit with their student for lunch, or create a ‘Celebration of Learning’ where students share projects they’ve been working on. Offer caregivers opportunities to get involved even if they aren’t available during the school day.

Offer caregivers opportunities to get involved even if they aren’t available during the school day.





Refrain From Using Educational Jargon

When you sit down with your caregivers, make sure you aren't using words/phrases/terms that, while commonplace to you as a teacher, are unfamiliar to people outside the field of education. "We use Everyday Math..." might make sense to someone who teaches at an elementary school.. However, to most people the words, "Everyday Math," indicate the adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing done while figuring out the bill at the restaurant or grocery store, not a mathematics curriculum. If we are not careful, we can intimidate the very people we are trying to work with, so make sure when you meet with caregivers, you are using terms that make sense to everyone.

Focus on the Positive, Not Just the Negative

Be consistently in touch — not just when things are challenging. Call or email caregivers whenever a student does a particularly nice job or has been exceptionally helpful in class. Put together a newsletter to help keep in touch with your caregivers on a consistent basis. Caregivers love to know what's going on in their child's classroom. The extra effort only takes a few minutes and does wonders for your relationship with caregivers. By focusing on their child's successes, you are able to equate parental interaction with positive news, ensuring that caregivers will be more willing to hear you out when there is an issue.

Keep the Focus on Their Child

If caregivers complain about unfair treatment towards their child and offer examples to support their conclusion, acknowledge that you often do different things with different students based on individual strengths, interests, and needs. Then, turn the focus back where it belongs, their child.

Be Proactive & Prompt

Proactive: Build a strong relationship before challenges arise. Contact caregivers as soon as you see academic problems or unproductive behavior patterns develop. You'll have a better chance to change these patterns if you catch them early and collaborate with the family to solve the challenge. Here are some things to discuss with caregivers:

- Areas where their child excels
- Their child's attention level during lessons
- Academic standing
- Specific areas where their child experiences difficulties
- Specific ways they can help their child at home
- How well their child gets along with classmates
- How long homework should take to complete
- Parental or familial concerns and/or questions
 - Ask for specific examples if you don't clearly understand the parent's concern.

Prompt: A key to solving the problem is to make the parent's concern a priority and provide a quick response. Do not put off these conversations for long. While it makes sense to take a little time to prepare, delaying a response might further upset the parent.

It is best to communicate expectations about your response time early in the school year. To begin, under promise and over-deliver. For example, "I will return emails and phone calls within 48 hours". Then surprise and delight them by getting back to them within 24 hours.

Build Their Trust

Caregivers need to know that you have their child's best interest at heart, and building their trust is often a gradual process. One effective method is to do what you say you are going to do. If you say you will communicate within a time frame, do it! In conversations with caregivers, be aware of what is said and how it is said, the tone of voice used, the body language demonstrated, and the environment. These can all have an impact on how caregivers perceive you and respond. In order to establish trust, you have to first demonstrate "respect for others" before you've earned the right to be respected. Then, continue to do the things that build trust over time.

One way to build trust is to establish a strong classroom community. This can set a positive foundation that helps you deal with the difficult issues that arise from time to time. Then, when you have to deliver difficult information to a parent, you have established a healthy relationship and they know that you value them as a partner and school community member.

Creating a strong community takes additional time and effort, but it truly is a case of, “an ounce of prevention is worth its weight in gold.”

Downloadable Tools for Classroom Communication

We’ve included several resource that you can use to establish strong communication with your students, their families, an even other educators! Try out the included sample script to help you tackle an intimidating parent phone call, or use our social media tips to keep your classroom families connected all year long. We’ve even included a template for communicating with your substitute teacher!



Sample Script for Parent Phone Call

Introduction

Generic salutations are best when contacting a student's caregiver.

Ex: "Hi, this is (teacher name), I'm (student's name) teacher from (school). Is this (student's name) home? Who am I speaking with, please?"

Try to call caregivers on their cell phone, but if you need to make a call to their workplace, do not identify yourself unless asked. Then, use your name only to assure privacy for the family.

Ex. "Hello, this is (teacher name) May I speak with (parent name) please?"



Request Permission

Requesting permission at the beginning of the conversation fosters an engagement in the conversation.

Ex: "Can I have a few minutes of your time?"

Ex: "Is this a good time?"



Positive Comments

Share a concrete example with the parent showing the student's success.

Ex: "(Student name) did a wonderful job in class today when (he/she) chose to (insert positive comment here).



Areas of Concern

Carefully ease into the concern you have. Be sure to provide specific evidence of the situation.

Ex. "I have noticed in class that (state behavior here). In our classroom, (state expectation here). When (state student behavior here) is happening then it is stopping learning for (him, her, others). I have tried (provide specific strategies you have used)."



Sample Script for Parent Phone Call (cont.)

Relationship Building

Take the time to ask the parent his or her opinion about the issue and solicit their input for ways to correct the situation. They know their child best, use this knowledge to your advantage.

Ex: “Are you noticing anything similar at home?”

Ex: “Have you found something that works well to correct (state student behavior)?”



Solicit Caregiver Support

To fully engage caregivers we must also provide opportunities for them to partner in their children’s education.

Ex: “Can you remind (student name) to continue to work on it daily?” “Ask (student name) to show you daily project assignments which I’ve signed.”



School Support — (Help’s on the Way) — Engagement

During the call, caregivers need to feel that they’re not alone. Speak specifically to how you will assist the student and include a timeline for the changes. Tell the caregiver what you will be doing in the classroom and make sure to ask them if they can see any problems with this plan.

Ex: “So I think with both of us supporting (student name). (He/she) will do well. You can make sure (he/she) works on the project 10 minutes everyday, and I’ll check in to see if the directions were followed.” “I also think the monthly positive phone calls will help both of us stay informed. Do you think that this is the appropriate course of action for (student name)?”



End the Conversation on a Positive Note

Let the caregiver know that you will remain in contact through a mode of communication that is ideal for the caregiver. Always remember to keep the door open and establish your timeline for follow-up with the caregiver.

Ex: “Thank you so much for your open communication and your time. I enjoy (positive observation or antidote) in our classroom. I’ve really enjoyed talking with you about (student name), and how we can support (him/her). I think if we continue to work together we can help (student name) have a successful year. Is this the best number to reach you? As I hope you know, if there is ever anything you need or any concerns you have, please don’t hesitate to contact me. Thank you for talking with me. Take care.”

A Teacher's Cheat Sheet for Social Media Posts: 25 Social Media Content Ideas

Finding new and engaging ways to communicate with families can be overwhelming for teachers. Here are a few easy ideas to maximize the benefits of social media tools, but minimize the amount of work for you!

PHOTOS AND VIDEOS ENGAGE

Parents love getting a peek into the classroom to see what their student is up to. A quick photo or brief video will engage parents and put a smile on their face.

- Photograph daily routines like morning circle, work time, or group projects.
- Snap a quick photo of individual students showing off an art project or favorite book.
- Recess! This is a great time to capture fun and friendships.
- Highlight an exemplary student. Write a brief statement about his/her accomplishments.
- Capture a brief video of your students in a specialist class. Ask the gym or music teacher to share a clip of students in action.

CLASSROOM BUSINESS

Ditch that classroom newsletter that you dread writing each week. Instead, use social media to post news and stay connected.

Share important school or class events coming up.

- Remind parents about homework deadlines or permission slip due dates.
- Recruit volunteers or request classroom supplies.
- Introduce a new student or say goodbye to a student moving away.
- Answer a common parent question. Use text or video.

CONTENT CONNECTIONS

Keep parents in the loop about what students are learning in the classroom.

- Photograph a classroom or hallway bulletin board display for a nice visual of class work.
- Explain directions to a fun game or activity that students have enjoyed.
- Share a problem to be solved. Recognize or reward work posted or returned the following day.
- Start a scavenger hunt. Students post pictures of items focused on a certain letter or theme.
- Post a video of an after school event (i.e., music concert) for families that are unable to attend.



Before you
Tweet, post or
share, follow the
rules! Be sure to
read your district's
technology and
social media
policy.

CONTENT EXTENSIONS

Give suggestions on ways families can engage with their student to extend classroom learning at home.

- Photograph a mysterious object connected to your curriculum focus. Invite students to explain the object to their family.
- Share a product recommendation. Parents love hearing about educational games and apps that will help review and extend their child's learning.
- Post challenge work. Ask questions, share problems or lay out entire projects.
- Give a sneak peek into an upcoming unit or lesson. Get kids/families excited.
- Post a link to a great blog or website that you enjoy.

CLASSROOM BUSINESS

Don't reinvent the wheel. Share great content created by others or repurpose your own.

- Repost a great article or fact related to your students or your curriculum content.
- Type a quote that inspires you!
- Share an appropriate post from your personal FB, Twitter or Instagram page.
- Invite an administrator or specialist teacher to "guest post" on your feed.
- Repost from another teacher or from the school's social media account.

Notes for Substitute Teacher

Thank you for teaching in my absence. Gathered with this note, you will find the following:

- Class list
- Classroom management plan
- Class schedule
- Lesson plans
- Special notes about student(s)

All materials can be found on the front table.

[] You can contact me during the day using the following contact information:

[] I am not available to answer questions during the day. If you need assistance or have a question, please ask my collaborating teacher next door or the assistant principal.

Below are some notes about our typical day. Please leave detailed notes for me, so I can pick up right where you left off.

NOTES

—> Looking for a customizable version of the Substitute Teacher Notes?
[Use this template!](#)

Notes for Substitute Teacher

NOTES

Tips for Lesson Planning



Think back to that first lesson plan you created in your teacher prep program and about the hundreds of lesson plans you will write in your teaching career. As you learn more about instruction, you'll discover time saving tricks while planning purposeful, precise, and passionate lessons for students.

Plan With a Colleague

Teachers are busy; that's the truth. As a teacher, you have a fantastic opportunity to collaborate with colleagues to co-plan content. Plan time on a weekly basis to work together and discuss challenges, upcoming lessons, etc. Even a once-a-week check-in can serve as a great chance to think things through or get advice. So, find a friend (it doesn't even have to be someone in your school), set a weekly date, and commit to conversing and collaborating consistently.

Ask Your Students

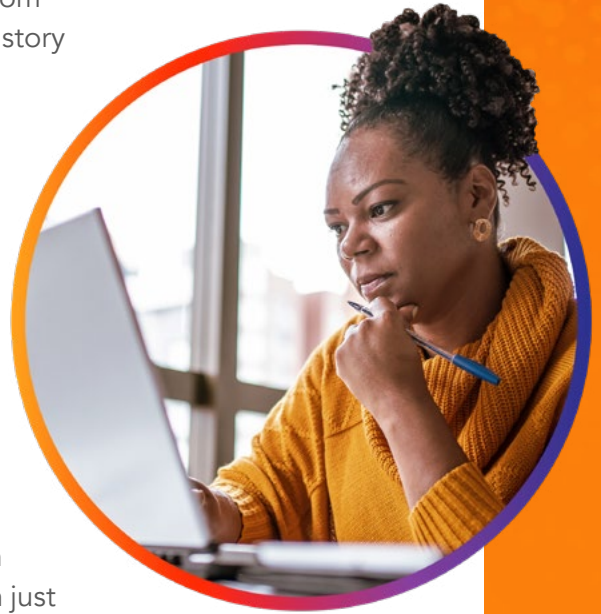
Starting in your early years of teaching, create a habit of getting feedback from students at the end of units, quarters, and semesters. Ask about your teaching, their disposition towards the class, if they're having fun, and anything that will help you improve your impact. But don't let those milestone moments be the only times you survey your students.

Once you develop a feedback system, you can start surveying students in the middle of units (or sometimes even following individual lessons) as formative assessment which can really help you plan lessons with greater precision. Sometimes this feedback simply confirms that what you have planned is what your students need, but other times it can help you take a slightly different, or even a completely different, approach to instruction.

Rethink the Role of Data

As an educator, you have access to multiple sources of data on each student, and you will continually collect data through assessment, observation, conferences, etc. Data is more than just student performance data. It can also include school process, demographic, and perceptual data or even data collected from family members. Collecting a wide variety of data to tell the story is vital to make it more engaging and understandable to families and students. This data can be overwhelming, and data analysis can sound daunting. However, once tools, resources, and analysis processes are outlined, you won't need a degree in statistics to be data literate!

As you think about your planning, consider finding ways to use data to shape your instruction. One of our favorite quick ways to do this is what we call the "spot check." For example, when students are working on writing, at different intervals throughout the work, take a look at several pieces of student work — three students who tend to knock it out of the park, three students who tend to be on track, and three students who tend to need extra support. In just looking at nine papers, you can gain a pretty good sense of what you need to do with your instruction to help the wide range of students in the class. Whatever the technique, consider the ways data can help your planning.



Use What Works

Innovation is a wonderful thing, and the mere use of the word seems to have really pushed teachers, as a whole, to try new approaches to instruction on a more regular basis. That said, it is important to also ensure you use research-based methods and strategies that have been shown to work. As you plan for the future, remind yourself to ask the following question, "What worked in the past?"

Many of us LOVE to try new things but also know that sometimes the best way to approach certain lessons and units is to do what has always worked. Keep innovating, but as you grow in your teaching career, don't forget the methods or strategies that have worked in the past; your best lessons might just be hanging out there in the wings, waiting to be used again.

Go Digital!

As you start writing more lesson plans, consider skipping over the old lesson plan books and going digital instead! There are an abundance of tech tools on the market today that can help you save time and stay organized.

Why Go Digital?

- You have complete control over the design and layout of your lesson plan page
- Formatting tools (color, font, size) allow you to emphasize components of your lesson
- You can collaborate on your lessons with others or simply provide access to view
- You can embed direct links to supplemental documents, websites, and videos
- Changes can be made easily and in real-time so all collaborators are updated
- Save time planning daily or weekly routine activities with the copy/paste function
- Access from any device or computer by logging into your Google Drive

We've found the Google platform to be the most versatile and offers the features that make going digital irresistibly easy. Get started with by adding our [Custom Lesson Plan Template](#) to your Google Drive! You can use the formatting tools to customize colors, subjects, times, etc. to your liking. Input all of your weekly activities, share with your colleagues and enable commenting for easy collaboration.

If you need a little more direction to navigate Google Slides or would like to know how to create your own template from scratch, check out our [Digital Lesson Plan Tutorial](#). We'll walk you through the process of creating the ideal layout based on your daily schedule, formatting for an organized look, and building in efficiencies with copy/paste, collaboration, and document linking.

And if you prefer to stick with pen and paper, don't worry we've still got you covered with the printable lesson plan template included in this section on the following page!

Lesson Plan Template

Class/Subject:	
Topic/Unit:	
Lesson Objectives / Learning Targets:	
Standard(s) Covered:	
Essential Questions:	
Materials / Resources Needed:	
Introduction / Anticipatory Set:	
Vocabulary:	
Lesson Procedure:	Direct Instruction:
	Guided Practice:
	Independent Practice:
	Summary/Closing Activity:
Learning Supports / Scaffolds / Accommodations:	
Learning Extensions:	
Assessment:	
Notes:	
Post Lesson / Teacher Reflection:	



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