



Beverly Tyner's Survival Tips for New Teachers



Welcome to Teaching!

Starting your first year of teaching can be both exciting and challenging. In order to get your year off to a good start, you need to be organized. The new teacher who is well organized, makes plans, and sets goals is more likely to move through the year with ease.



You are in the unique position to make long-term impacts on the lives of the students that are a part of your classroom. Along with this privilege comes an enormous amount of responsibility. Teaching is not for the faint of heart or for those who are afraid of hard work. Teaching is the hardest work that you will ever do, because it involves work of the mind as well as the heart. Here are some simple tips to assist you in getting off to a smooth, successful start!

1. Get Control of the Classroom

Be their teacher, not their friend.

Students need to feel secure, and that means they need *you* to be in control. Do not make the mistake of trying to win the students' affection by relinquishing control. Your goal is to have students *like* you and *respect* you. They will work hard for you if they like and respect you as a person.

Establish rules of conduct.

Start with the rules for discipline, not the curriculum. Discipline refers to behavior and has penalties and rewards. No matter what grade you teach, you must have control over the class. Clearly communicate the rules and consequences for each broken rule.

Develop classroom procedures.

Procedures refer to getting things done and have no penalties or rewards. Practice makes perfect. This has special implications for the beginning classroom teacher. Take the time to develop procedures for everything: how to line up, walk in the hall, head papers, turn in homework, pass in papers, and so forth. Decide on the procedures that you feel are important to running your classroom "like a well-oiled machine." Make a list and plan to teach, practice, and reinforce those procedures. With procedures in place, you will have the time to devote to powerful teaching and be for your students the effective teacher they need and deserve.

2. Establish Relationships

Get to know your students' parents.

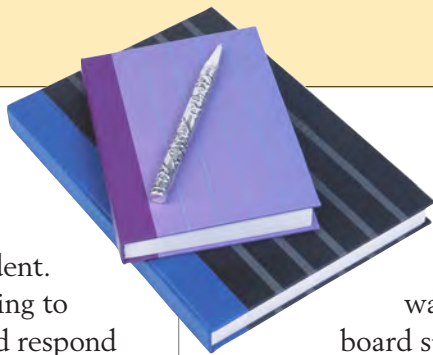
Parents can be a big factor in your success as a first-year teacher or your biggest nightmare. Send a letter home with each child with some basic ground rules for the year:

1. Introduce yourself and give some insight into your instructional plan for the year.
2. If you have a problem concerning your child, call me before you call the principal. Together, we can address most issues that concern your child.
3. Please make sure that your child gets to school on time each day and is not absent for any reason other than illness or death in the family.
4. Please trust me with your child. I care for each one personally as well as professionally. I truly want your child to be successful in my classroom as well as in the future.
5. If you need to see me, please send me a note or call the office to schedule an appointment. Please do not show up at my classroom door unannounced. Each and every moment that I can spend in instructing your child is important.

Get to know your students.

Learn the names of all of your students. Take photographs of all students and keep them close at hand. Along with





the photos, list personal interests, hobbies, or strengths that define each student. Your students are going to respect you more and respond to you much easier when you can relate to them in a personal way.

There is no better way to get your day and your students' day off to a good start than by greeting each one at the classroom door. You can quickly turn the day around for the student who has already had a rocky start and can check in on status of each student.

Get to know the school staff.

You are going to have some tough days your first year, and you will need a strong support system in the school. Those tough days will go a lot easier if you have friends on the staff. Whether you are having a discipline problem or you just need to vent, have trusted friends that are available to you. You will be surprised how much you will learn as you share successes as well as challenges.

3. Get Organized

Professionally and Personally

Organize your classroom.

Your classroom will be your home away from home, so make it attractive and comfortable for you. Avoid overdecorating with store-bought materials. Give thought to how the classroom space (including wall space) will

best be used to support instruction. Designate wall or bulletin board space to house theme-based vocabulary and content.

Dress for success.

Yes, that means leave the jeans, short skirts, and t-shirts at home. When students see that you are serious about your job as a teacher, their respect for you will increase. An older principal once told a group of new teachers, "If you want to have good discipline in your classroom, dress professionally." It may seem strange, but trust those who have been in this business for a long time. Without good discipline, you will become easily frustrated as a new teacher.

Arrive early so that you have time to gather materials and plan for the day.

Arriving early is one of the keys to a successful first year. Take time to mentally walk through the day before your students arrive to make sure that you have all the materials and resources that you will need. Take a few minutes to relax and focus on what is ahead.

Play quiet background music as students arrive.

Use music that you as well as the students enjoy. Music has the unique ability to put everyone in a good mood and calm those students who may have had less than a serene start to their day.

4. Know the Curriculum

First and foremost, you are there to teach your students. There will never be enough hours in the school day to teach everything that you feel is important for your students to learn. You must, therefore, prioritize your teaching goals and objectives.

Become knowledgeable about the standards for the grade level and subjects that you will be responsible for teaching.

The state and local standards provide the framework from which all instruction should be based. If you do not know where to find them, simply ask. The standards are the targets that you want all students to reach by the end of the school year. It is much easier to hit the targets when you know exactly what they are. The resources provided through the basal texts and other supplementary materials are there to support your instruction of the grade-level standards. Do not falsely assume that if you proceed page by page through any textbook that you have taught the grade-level standards.

Know your students' academic strengths and weaknesses and consider these when planning for instruction.

You will be able to plan more effectively when you know where each and every student falls developmentally

in each curricular area. This information will be critical as you make plans for whole-group, small-group, and independent learning activities. Whole-group instruction can be challenging as you strive to address the wide range of learners that you will probably have in your classroom. How will you deliver the grade-level standards in such a way that is challenging yet achievable for all your students? Small-group instruction will be your opportunity to differentiate instruction based on the needs of your students, which could mean intervention for struggling students or enrichment for higher achievers.

Write detailed lesson plans.

All effective teaching evolves from a well-envisioned plan. There are numerous activities that you could choose to do; take the time to plan the most powerful lesson based on the needs of your students as they relate to the grade-level curriculum. Do not falsely assume that you will be able to leave with the students in the afternoon. Quality planning takes time and thought and cannot usually be completed during the student day. Overplanning is always a good idea as a new teacher. It will take some time to get a good sense of lesson pacing, and you can always carry your plans over to the next day.



Select 10 quality, grade-level appropriate read-alouds to have on hand when things do not go as planned.

All students love to be read to, no matter how young or how old. Choose your books and select story vocabulary to focus on and a comprehension strategy that you will apply to the story. Use this as a springboard to writing. Do not forget to include fiction and nonfiction texts. This is a great way to engage the most reluctant (or disruptive) students in a quality learning activity.

Make friends with the reading expert in your school.

You may be surprised to know that most teachers graduating with a teaching degree from his or her college or university feel ill prepared to teach reading. No

matter what grade or subject area you are responsible for teaching, reading will be an important ingredient. Talk to your principal to identify the teacher who knows the most about how to teach reading—that person may not be someone on your grade level. The reading level of your students will strongly affect their progress not only in reading but also in science, social studies, and even math. It is, therefore, critical that you understand the teaching of reading at your grade level. With the wide range of readers that will be in any classroom, it will be especially important to start small-group instruction early so that you will feel competent in addressing individual needs.

There will be joys and there will be struggles—this is to be expected. Be assured that the struggles will be well worth the effort as you join the ranks of true professionals. Teachers make a difference one child at a time and ultimately shape the very future of our society. Good luck!

Beverly Tyner is the best-selling author of *Small-Group Reading Instruction: A Differentiated Teaching Model for Beginning and Struggling Readers* (second edition) and coauthor of *Small-Group Reading Instruction: A Differentiated Teaching Model for Intermediate Readers, Grades 3–8*.