

Essential Advice for New Educators



**Increase
efficiency in
multiple areas,
including planning,
instruction,
and discipline.**

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Even though those in your college of education worked earnestly to prepare you for independent instruction, you may still encounter issues in the classroom that you may be ill-equipped to address. No matter how phenomenal your professors were, you may feel as though you do not know what you are doing at times. Why? Teachers must daily perform an enormous number of duties and make a wide variety of decisions, many unique to specific circumstances. Although no one can be prepared for every situation, this list of advice can help prepare you for circumstances that colleges may fail to mention.

PLANNING

Students may not be as excited as you are.

Be prepared for some students to be negative toward school and learning. Look for ways to attract their interest, but do not feel discouraged if they do not catch your enthusiasm.

Make daily goals and check them off when completed.

You will have many tasks to do each week. Organize these by deadlines. Prioritizing weekly goals into small, daily tasks will help you stay on track.

Avoid relying on the way your former teachers taught.

Just because you excelled when a teaching method was used does not mean it will work for all of your students. Observe other teachers, try new methods, and survey your students to assess learning styles. Do not be afraid of change.

Seek positive reinforcement.

Other teachers may not readily perceive your innovative approaches as clever ideas for promoting learning. Do not be discouraged by negativity if you encounter it. Seek out teachers who are also creative and inventive. Collaborate with them to make lessons and materials. Your students will appreciate your extra effort.

Talk to your colleagues often.

Experienced teachers are a gold mine for tips to help you establish routines, deal with issues in the classroom, and manage resources. Learn from them. They have as much to offer as professors, and their tips are aimed at your specific student demographics.

Save lesson plans, laminate resources, and make master copies of everything.

Getting in the habit of teaching the same way every year is inadvisable; however, saving and improving well-planned lessons and resources that effectively taught standards is wise. McCann, Johannessen,

and Barnes-Ryan (2010) suggest making online or manila files organized by instructional units. You will save much time in the planning and creation of resources without having to start from scratch each year. Even if you teach a different grade level, you may be able to adapt your resources.

Do not assume that students have prior knowledge or skills.

Pretest students to diagnose their learning needs. Just because a skill is in the previous year's standards does not mean students mastered it then or remember it now.

Always preview assignments.

Resources that accompany your textbook series may not align with or adequately assess your standards. The internet and your creative side are valuable supportive resources.

Preview all video clips or movies.

Even if you have seen the video before, watch it again through the eyes of a teacher. Things you overlook at home may be inappropriate for school. Watch out for online advertisements on video websites, too. Be sure to find out if your school has a policy regarding videos before showing them in your classroom.



Have a plan B and plan C on observation day.
Things *will* go wrong. The Wi-Fi may not work some days. Your computer may crash. Have back-up plans with activities and resources in case of technology failure.

INSTRUCTION

Students lacking supplies can be an endless battle.

Students will need items such as paper or pencils for various reasons. Buy extra with your room fund and ask for donations. Do not waste instructional time on this issue. You can also ask students to donate useful supplies that they do not want at the end of the year when they clean out lockers.

Valuing each student's unique characteristics encourages a feeling of belonging and discourages bullying.

Mistakes happen.

Making a mistake during instruction can actually be a positive thing. Seeing that mistakes are normal is a good lesson for students. Teach them how to react and make corrections. It will encourage them to take risks and not be afraid to make an error.

If everyone understands easily, you may need to challenge students more.

Even though it may make you feel like you are a great teacher if everyone thinks a lesson is easy, it may indicate a need to push students further. NCTM identified productive struggle as a necessary component of mathematics instruction (2014). Challenge students at an appropriate level and push them to persevere to solve problems.

Focus on the future instead of the past.

Some students may be behind, but you are not expected to work miracles. Focus on improvement and help them learn as much as possible. Refrain from placing blame on previous teachers; underachievement has many causes.

The first two weeks of school can be a blur.

Preplan during the summer to make the first few weeks of school easier. Give preassessments to

diagnose needs, prepare activities to get to know students, and practice routines (such as what to do with homework, the all-quiet signal, etc.) with students.

Change can happen often.

Be flexible and always willing to learn. Your student roster may change throughout the year. Policy and schedule alterations may happen. You may not teach the same grade level or subjects each year. Since this is part of teaching, rise to the challenge with a smile.

New initiatives may not come with instructions.

With new administrators at the school, district, and state levels come new ideas about best practices as well as possible changes in standards. These initiatives may not be accompanied by directions or training. Seek training on your own at conferences or online to ensure you are prepared to implement initiatives effectively.

DISCIPLINE

Collaborate with students.

Ask for student input the first week of school. Allow them to help develop classroom rules and consequences, discuss ideas for class rewards, and identify topics of interest.

Pick your battles with misbehaving students.

No single disciplinary method will work for all students. Smart and Igo (2010) found in a study of first-year teachers that trial and error is very common in dealing with classroom misbehavior. Teachers in the study learned from their past experiences to design their own behavior plans for consistent misbehavior. Although you must address behavioral issues to teach effectively, you should value instructional time.

Students may not know that plagiarism and forgery are crimes.

You could receive a parent signature that looks nothing like those on previous report cards, or you may collect a written assignment that has unoriginal material. Teach your students about the seriousness of these issues and their consequences.

How you respond to students sets the tone.

Your class could be ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse. Valuing each student's unique characteristics encourages a feeling of belonging and discourages bullying. Respond quickly, boldly, and according to school policies to any instances of bullying.

You can only control what happens in your classroom.

Problems may arise due to violence, lack of food, or custody issues at home. Provide structure for these children at school. Hold all of them to high standards and show all of them love. You may be the best role model they have.

CULTURE

School culture can vary widely from school to school.

Different schools can have vastly different dress codes for students and teachers. Different student demographics contribute to the school atmosphere and make it unique. Administrators at different schools may have various leadership styles. Get to know your school and community so you can teach responsively.

Learn the lingo.

Students will try to write IDK (I don't know) as an answer. Perhaps they do not know the # sign as a *pound* or *number* sign. Now, it is a *hashtag* symbol. Stay current to connect with them. By being culturally responsive, teachers can relate to students, better understand them, and incorporate student interests into instruction to increase motivation (Rajagopal 2011).

Learn the logistics.

Find out what procedures are used for hall passes; practices vary from school to school. Ask where teachers eat lunch. They may eat alone in their classrooms, in the cafeteria with students, or together in a break room. Be sure to ask if you will have assistance from a teacher's aide. Inquire about making copies in your school. Copy machines may have different operating procedures, so you may need to ask someone to show you how to use the machines. Find out if you need a password for the copiers and ask if there are limitations on the number of copies you can make each month.

Know your school's summer schedule and activities.

You may be required to attend professional development sessions, in-service days, and state trainings during the summer. Using summer break to prepare for the next school year is always a good idea. Of course, you should enjoy the much-needed time to relax, too!

COMMITMENT

Anticipate extra assignments.

You could be required to work events, such as ball games, Meet Your Teacher Night, parent-teacher conferences, and so on. Do this with a



smile and support your school. You can choose to join committees in which you can be a participant to help your school while also preserving your time (McCann, Johannessen, and Barnes-Ryan 2010). View these duties as opportunities to build relationships with students, families, and school staff.

Maintain balance between your personal life and work.

Some teachers use time at home to grade papers, plan lessons, or create resources. However, your family needs you just as much as your students do. If you consistently take work home at night, set a time that you will stop working and spend time with your family or relax.

You could be solicited to buy things for fundraisers.

Students from various clubs, sports, and organizations will approach you to purchase items throughout the year. Support your school when you can, but do not feel obligated.

Reward yourself.

Find a way to relax often with music, Netflix, books, exercise, and so on. Your students need you to destress so you can be at your best when you teach. Treat yourself well during your breaks from school.

HUMAN RELATIONS

Parents may blame you.

Students who are failing or who receive



disciplinary notices may not accept responsibility for their actions. Parents may believe that it is the teacher who is not performing up to par. Document your efforts to help students and share this with parents.

Write thank you notes.

When students or parents buy gifts for you, show appreciation with a thank you note. When parents or volunteers help in your classroom, formally thank them also. Always thank special guests by sending notes, and encourage students to do likewise.

Do not be afraid to ask for help.

You may need help at times. Friends, family members, school staff, and other teachers are excellent

sources of help. You may even have parents willing to help you do such tasks as label, sort, and file papers if you request their assistance.

Use your mentor.

According to Ingwalson and Thompson (2007), veteran teachers may disregard the struggles that you face because they consider first-year difficulties as a rite of passage. Although this may be true for some teachers, your mentor wants to help you. However, a mentor may not know what you need, so you must reach out to them.

Value your support staff.

Teachers, faculty, and support staff are a team. Encourage your students to show respect to other teachers, aides, custodians, and secretaries. Befriend your maintenance and technology personnel because they can make your life much easier.

FUTURE

You may feel like a celebrity.

When you go the grocery store, bank, or restaurant, students could be excited to see you. Even students whom you have not had in class may notice you. Each year that you teach, the number of students who may do this

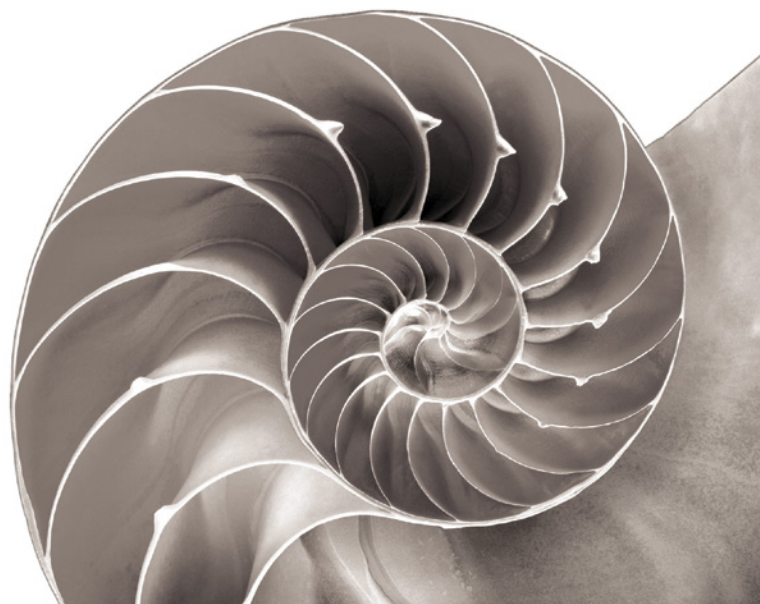
ARTISTEER/THINKSTOCK

I ♥ logarithmic spirals.

MATHEMATICS
IS ALL AROUND US.



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could grow. Be a good role model and be friendly.

Students may remember you for the rest of their lives. Make it count!

Just think of all of your previous teachers. Some are remembered favorably; others are not. What you say and do may stick with students forever. What do you want to be remembered for?

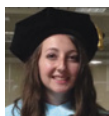
Enjoy your first year, and hope for more in the future.

The first year might be hard. Experience, however, is an excellent teacher. You will likely gain wisdom that can be used to make you a better educator, setting the stage for an excellent teaching career.

You have the opportunity to help prepare productive citizens and future leaders of our world. Although this may require that you perform extra duties or use time that you do not expect, it is worthy of your dedication. Being as prepared as possible can make a tremendous difference in your early success. Knowing what questions to ask, planning effectively, and learning to use resources wisely are just a few ways you can make your early teaching career successful. Embrace the challenge set before you and make a difference in the lives of students.

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