

Substitute Teacher's Survival Guide

10 Keys to Success



by Joe Casbarro

Substitute teaching is a very challenging job. Whether your assignment is as a *substitute*, *guest* or *visiting* teacher working at the primary, middle or senior secondary level, this reference guide is packed with valuable and practical information that will greatly assist you in your assignment. Although substitute procedures vary from school to school, these *10 Keys to Success* can be utilised in conjunction with "school-specific" training and resources to make your experience positive and rewarding.

Key 1: Arrive Early and Ask Questions

It is important that you arrive early for your substitute assignment. Upon arrival, report directly to the school's main office (unless otherwise directed) and be prepared to ask the following questions:

• Who am I substituting for?

If you already know the name of the teacher and class, then just confirm that information upon arrival. Automated substitute registry systems often provide online or phone activated information to substitutes prior to your arrival for work.

• Where is the substitute folder or packet of materials?

A designated substitute folder may be available either in the main office or on the teacher's desk in the assigned classroom. It contains important information such as the daily schedule, class roster(s) and lesson plans that you will need to review prior to the students' arrival.

• Where is the classroom located and the key to the door?

In many schools, classroom doors can only be locked and unlocked with a key. In the event of an intruder/lockdown situation, you will need to secure your classroom. (See Key 6)

• Do I have a list of contact numbers to call in an emergency?

You should have the intercom number of the main office and the nurse in the event of any emergency. It is also important to know who your primary contact person is during your substitute assignment period. It may be a main office secretary, an assistant principal or a departmental chairperson. Regardless of who is designated, you should know to whom questions should be directed during your substitute assignment.

• Do I have any other duties during the day?

It is important to note that in many schools classroom teachers have duty periods that might entail supervision during non-instructional periods of the day (i.e. bus arrival/departure, lunchtime/recess, corridor duty).

• Is there anyone else with whom I will be directly working?

Your assignment might be in a special education or co-teaching environment. You may be working directly with a paraeducator or another teacher. If so, you will need to meet this colleague as soon as possible.

Please Note: Although many schools have formal training or orientation for substitutes before they begin work, others do not. Also, if you were hired after the designated training, you may not have received all of the orientation materials. Ask the school in which you work if they provide any substitute orientation or training materials.



Key 2: Organise the Day's Activities

Arriving early to work will also provide you with sufficient time to prepare for the day's activities. Before students arrive is a great time to:

▶ Review the materials left by the teacher in their substitute folder

- Class roster(s) and seating charts
- Daily schedule
- Lesson plans for the day

▶ Review any materials provided by the school

- Attendance reporting procedures
- Emergency procedures

- Bell schedule

▶ Check the emergency exit route in the event of a fire or evacuation

▶ Tour the classroom to familiarise yourself where things are located

- Are there different work centres or stations?
- Is an interactive whiteboard or other technology available?
- Is there a "quiet" corner or designated "cool down" area?
- Where are supplies kept?
- Is there a class library?

▶ Meet any colleagues with whom you may be expected to work

- A paraeducator
- A co-teacher
- A year level or subject area colleague
- Teacher's Aide
- Curriculum Coordinate

Please Note: Organisation for long-term versus short-term assignments is much easier since you will have the advantage of building relationships with students, parents and professional colleagues.

Key 3: Introduce Yourself in a Positive Fashion

How you introduce yourself upon the arrival of students, either at the beginning of the day for primary students, or at the beginning of each instructional period at the middle and senior secondary level, is extremely important. This introduction serves as a *first impression* for your students and *what you say and how you say it* will go a long way to setting the stage for the remainder of the day or class period. Besides introducing yourself by name, consider including the following points:

- You will be following the lesson plans and learning activities left by their regular classroom teacher.
- You will be sharing with their regular teacher how the day has gone, including any issues or concerns that arise (e.g. students need to know that if they misbehave or present difficulties, this will be reported to their regular teacher).
- Ask students to state their first name whenever you choose them to answer a question, or whenever they ask a question.
- Emphasise that you are excited to be working with them and ask them to help you whenever appropriate.