

STARTING SCHOOL RIGHT

*How do I plan for a successful first
week in my classroom?*

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The First Week Really Does Matter

As I was celebrating the end of graduate school and completing student teaching, every veteran teacher, principal, and professor encouraged me to start getting ready for my first week of teaching school next fall. These educators warned me that my survival, success, and stamina all depended on the first week of school. They cautioned that everything—parent–teacher conferences, a field trip in November, an experiment in March, and even testing—depended on a successful first week of school.

Like most student teachers, I began my practicum after that school year had started so I didn't have any firsthand experience with how to get the ball rolling. What did these professionals know that I didn't about the first week of school? And what should I do in May to prepare for September?

Is the first week of school that crucial? You bet it is.

Does the success of your entire school year depend upon it? No. But there are systems to put in place and strategies to use that can help you prepare a positive structure for the year. The systems and strategies that you implement during the first week of school—and continue to review and reinforce daily over the next month—will allow your students to feel comfortable with your expectations and will assist you in becoming a better educator.

In this book you'll find many strategies to help both you and your students start the year right. Most important, you will be guided in planning the beginning of the school year and thinking about how you define and achieve success in your classroom.

Every teacher in the country starts the year off a bit differently. Even if the scripts were the same, each teacher would express it differently according to his or her personality, in part by emphasizing different words and speaking at a different volume. Teaching *is* personal. Consider as many ideas as you can, but make sure that the ideas and systems you plan to use feel genuine. Otherwise, you'll implement a bunch of systems and ideas that you won't be able to stick with because they won't be authentic. Starting school right depends on knowing your competencies and weaknesses, along with your preferences and aversions.

The first week is meant to be exciting and fun, though you'll make more than a few mistakes. Don't let that get in the way of the thrill of starting the 10-month school-year journey.

This book does not provide a script to follow. Rather, it offers ideas so that you can figure out what works for you and what makes the first week of school the foundation of a terrific year. Read it straight through or find sections that are relevant to the issue you are dealing with today. Good luck—and enjoy the journey.

Survey Your Classroom

The week before school starts can be nerve-racking. Your mind races among multiple to-do lists, from figuring out how to set up the classroom to learning your students' names. The pressure may be daunting even to experienced teachers. It may surprise you that being a veteran teacher doesn't make the first week any easier. In fact, the pressure of having finished the last school year with an incredible class can make the expectations for the upcoming year overwhelming.

Now that you've been assigned a classroom, how can you make that room of random furniture and odds and ends feel like a place you want to live in? Here is what we will cover:

- Merging the classroom and your style
- Creating pathways
- Considering students' experiences

Merging the Classroom and Your Style

You cannot plan the set up for your classroom without seeing the room. What does the room offer? Make a drawing and note things that cannot be moved, including windows, doors, closets, built-in shelves or cubbies, whiteboards, pencil sharpeners, and sinks. Sometimes there are some absurdly useless pieces of furniture built into classrooms,