

Preparing to Teach



An Essential Checklist for New Teachers to Get Your First Term off to the BEST Start

How to Use This Handout

This checklist is designed as a discussion and reflection tool for mentors and teaching & learning leaders working with new teachers. It can be used to:

- ✓ Structure mentoring conversations at the start of term.
- ✓ Prompt reflection and goal-setting for new teachers.
- ✓ Identify areas where extra support, resources, or modelling may be needed.
- ✓ Revisit throughout the term to review progress and adapt strategies.

Encourage new teachers to use the checklist not just for preparation, but as an ongoing guide to building effective teaching habits.

Fail to Plan – Plan to Fail

When you have been teaching for many years, you have your routines set. You know what you need to do and preparation for a new term becomes more faster and more efficient. In your early years of teaching, you are paving the way for this more efficient future. Failing to plan ahead can lead to problems in teaching that are unnecessary. Getting prepared to teach can reduce your stress, build structure and focus, help you prepare and manage behaviour and ensure a professional start to your term. This article, derived from many years of teaching experience, will help you to swerve these avoidable issues and plan for success.

Get to Know Your Curriculum

Understand key learning goals for the term

You will have read your curriculum documents thoroughly but you must clearly understand the key learning goals. You will have a long term plan that shows you the bigger picture of learning and the expected end points for students. Within this plan it may appear that there is an overwhelming amount that students will need to know and be able to do. Be very clear on what the essential steps are to get to the end point. These essential steps are at the heart of your lessons. The clearer you are on what you are teaching and why this teaching step is important, the clearer your lessons will be for students. If you are able to explain why they are learning 'this' here, they will be more confident that this lesson is important and behaviour management becomes easier.

Know Your Curriculum Content from Their Perspective

As experts in a subject, we can often forget our own learning journey. It can be frustrating when someone does not understand what we see as obvious. An interesting exercise for new teachers to experience the curriculum from a novices' perspective is to complete activities metacognitively. You have prepared an activity for students and you are going to complete that activity yourself. Of course you know how to do it. You know the answers – it is easy. However, you are going to complete it with the intention of mapping your actions and thought processes. This preparation helps you to model the activities more effectively when students are completing them live in the classroom. You are able to see the point at which they are struggling and show them how an expert overcomes that obstacle.

3. Prepare Lesson Plans

Make Lessons Your Own

Your school may have a bank of resources to draw upon. If this is the case, do not allow preprepared lessons to make you complacent. Run through each lesson and adapt to make sure that you understand exactly what will happen at each stage. If you are unsure of anything, seek advice from experienced members of staff. You should adapt lessons so that they make sense to you.

Prepare to be Flexible

Lessons do not always go to plan. As your teaching career progresses, you will become more adept at redirecting learning when problems arise. In your early years, you can prepare for possible issues by considering what may happen at each stage in your lesson. Question activities and instructions with a "what if?" before you teach the lesson. By anticipating misconceptions before the lesson, you can be prepared with plans B and C. This will avoid you being blindsided by problems and ensure the students see a teacher that knows how to handle setbacks.

Prepare all Resources

Do not find yourself in the queue at the photocopier ten minutes before your lesson is due to begin. Prepare materials for your lessons at least two weeks in advance. You know your curriculum. You know what needs to be taught. The learning journey may not be a straight line but these materials will be used at some point. A good tip is to set aside a time for material preparation every week. Do not allow this time to be taken by anything else. Before term begins, you can prepare your first two weeks and, each week, you top up your resources for the coming fortnight. This routine will help to lower your stress levels as the busy term unfolds.

4. Classroom Procedures

Plan Your Routines

Your classroom is your space. You are in control of how students enter and exit the class. You decide upon the processes for handing in work, group work, silent study and so on. If students know that your routines are habitual, they will feel confident that they know your expectations. Be very clear on your classroom rules and procedures and be rigorous and relentless in ensuring that they are followed. This relentless attitude towards your expectations will pay off as students know exactly what to expect in your space. If your school have clear whole school policies, follow them to the letter. School communities are stronger when everyone follows the rules. Do not be led by students who tell you, “Mrs A lets us...” or “Mr B allows it...” In your classroom, the rules are set in stone and everyone is calmer for it.

Rewards and Consequences

Consequences must be fair and clear. Know your school consequence system inside out. In situations where you must apply sanctions, knowing the correct procedure and following it to the letter can avoid any argument. When students know that you are an expert on the behaviour system, they are less likely to challenge you or display poor behaviours in the first place.

Rewards are as important as consequences especially for students who do not naturally get joy from learning. How will you make students feel that they have achieved something in every lesson? Whether you give out raffle tickets for excellent answers, provide praise points for great effort or give stickers to the hardest workers, work out a reward system that you can apply easily and fairly so that everyone feels like they have achieved.

Prepare Your Space

Prepare Your Seats

If you are lucky enough to have your own classroom, prepare your space so that it is welcoming and practical for your lessons. How will you arrange your desks? Grouped tables are fantastic for collaboration but it can be tricky to manage behaviour when students aren't all facing you. Consider beginning the term with a more manageable set up until you get to know students.

Once you have decided upon your classroom set up, prepare seating plans for every class and stick to them. Do not allow students to decide where they will sit. If you do not know the students, use previous data to support your decisions. Students requiring more support should be easily accessible to you once a task has been set. If you notice a problem with the seating plan once a lesson begins, don't be afraid to adapt it quickly. This is your space and you make the seating decisions.

Organise Your Resources

Consider how you will arrange your resources so that they are easily accessible and can be returned neatly. Use labels to provide clarity for students as to what goes where. As the term goes on, disorganised classrooms turn into chaos. Nobody learns well in chaos. Prepare to avoid this by having a place for everything.

View The Room from Their Perspective

Sit in the students' seats. What does the room look like from their perspective? Are the displays useful or distracting? Does everyone have a clear view of the teaching area? Do all of the seats have plenty of space for the student or are some cramped and need adjusting? Looking through their eyes can help you to anticipate any number of problems and it is worth taking the time to do so.

Marking and Assessment

Marking

All teachers know that this is the most contentious part of teaching. Marking takes time. Similar to planning, set aside a weekly slot for marking students' work and stick to it. You don't need to mark everything and marking for markings' sake is pointless. If you know your learning goals, you know what you are marking for. Marking is planning if you are asking the right questions as you do it. Prepare to mark with intention.

Assessment

Your long term planning will show you the end point assessment for each unit. This can often take longer than regular marking. Prepare for this by setting aside longer periods of time for marking over those assessment periods. The more you plan ahead, the less likely that you will be to be overwhelmed.

Perfection Does Not Exist

Teaching is never perfect. It is a very human profession and unpredictable. The advice provided in this article will help you to prepare a road ahead that can deal with the unexpected because you have anticipated the problems that may arise. Don't try to be perfect—focus on being **prepared enough** to adapt. Things will change, students will surprise you, and you'll learn a lot as you go.

Good luck!

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