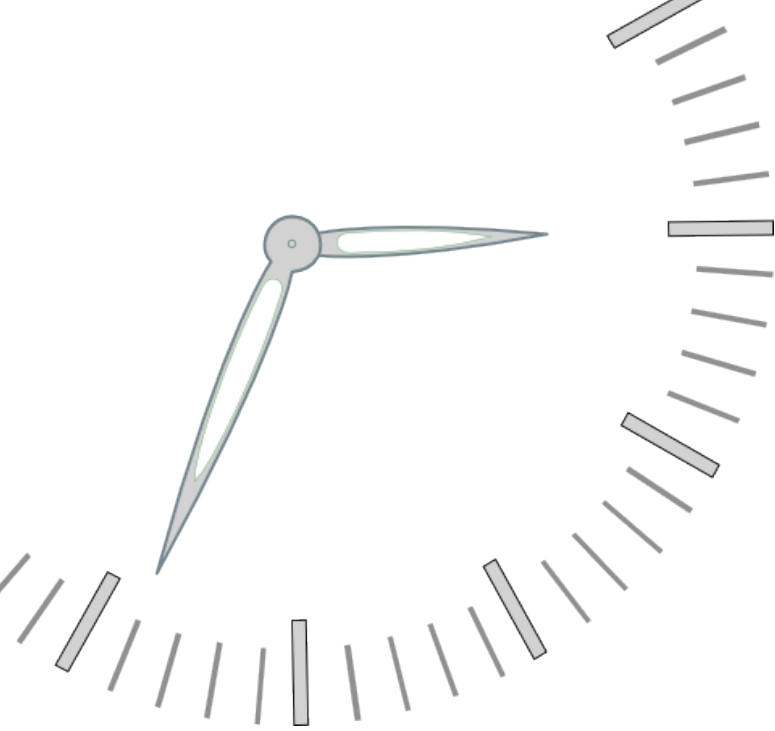




32

Time Saving Tips for Teachers





One of the biggest challenges for teachers is finding enough time in the day to do the things that matter most to you. The following tips are designed to help you save more time so that you can focus on the things that really matter.



Get Organized

One of the biggest time wasters is looking for material you know you have but can't find. Taking time to get organized will save you time in the future.

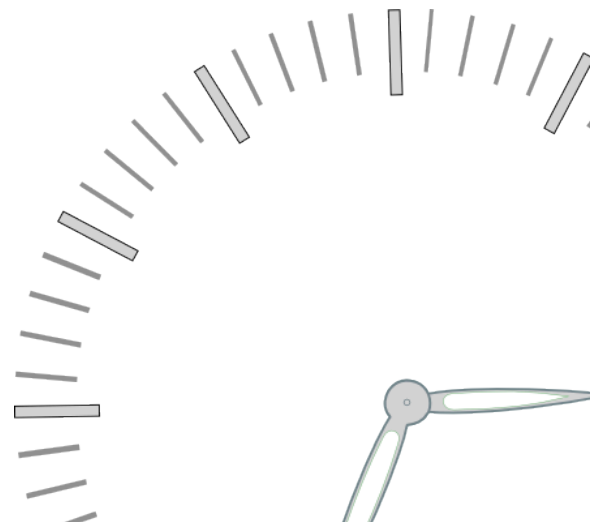
Throw out unused materials. (Admittedly, for some of us pack rats, this is the most difficult step.) Do you really need those worksheets you have had filed away for the past five years, just waiting for the right time to use them? Be ruthless. If you haven't used a thing for more than two years, then it is probably time to let go of it. (You may want to put them in a box, write "Free" on the side, and put them in your school's faculty lounge.)

Create a place or space for the materials you keep. As you tackle your desk, divide your paperwork into categories: To Do, To File, To Read, To Hold (and any other broad category of paperwork that you need to keep nearby). Your "To File" pile will probably be the largest. For now, put it to the side and we will deal with in the next step. In order to keep your paperwork organized in the future, you will need some type of file holder to place on your desk or near it. As each piece of paperwork lands on your desk, place it in its proper category. You will, of course, periodically file the "To File" paperwork—don't let it build up.

File everything. Now for the "To File" pile. You will want to have file folders and a marking pen for labeling the folders handy, as well as the "round file," otherwise known as the trash can. Again, be ruthless! Throw out anything that you know will never use or that is out-of-date or no longer relevant. The type of folders you will create depends on your individual circumstances. Make a file for everything you need to keep. (Even if the file has only one piece of paper in it.) This will make finding paperwork much simpler. Some teachers use colored files for certain categories (e.g. blue for student information, yellow for curriculum, green for tests/quizzes/answer keys. Here are some typical categories:

- Lesson plans/Lesson plan ideas. (It is a good idea to keep individual lesson plans in their own folder, properly labeled. You may also want to keep any ancillary material in there also---transparencies, handouts---any item you will use with that particular lesson.)
- Student information (if you have more than one class, make a separate folder for each class)
- Discipline Issues
- Student scores (if you need to keep Lexile, test scores, or other evaluation scores)
- Correspondence
- Schedules
- Forms
- Originals (of handouts, worksheets, etc.)
- Test/Quiz Masters and Answer Keys
- Substitute Information (including emergency lesson plans, instructions)

Place your now-full file folders in a file cabinet or holder. You may want to alphabetize them, put them in order of use, or according to color.

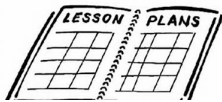




Use a daily planner.

Keep all your "to do" lists there.

Or, keep one calendar handy and write everything on it that you need to accomplish. Memories fail at times. Some teachers keep a planner on their desk at all times, some use large desk calendars, and some use their smart phones. Whichever type you prefer, use it.



Use your planning period wisely.

Plan your planning time with the same care that you plan your lessons.

Yes, it's hard to resist chatting in the lounge, but for every minute you spend chatting, that's one minute you will have to make up later on.



Do not check your email first.

Email is one of our biggest distractions.

When you arrive at work in the morning, take care of your most important task first. Then, check email. You'll find that you are much more productive.



Check email only twice per day.

Repeatedly checking email throughout the day can be a huge time drain.

Select two times during the day when you will check your email. For instance, you can choose to check your email at the beginning of the school day (but only after you have completed your more important task first!) and then at the end of the day.



Bundle your errands.

If you have to walk down to the main office, try to take care of all of your main office errands at one time.

Take along any other errands you could get done with you. It is often helpful to make a list of all the errands you have to get done for the day and then plan a strategy to get them all done in one trip.



Save difficult tasks for peak periods.

Do not try to accomplish difficult tasks when you are tired.

If often leads to making mistakes or overlooking details that you will have to re-do at another time.



Always have something to read with you.

That professional journal you never have time to read? That new curriculum guide you are trying to understand?

You might be able to finish an article while you are waiting for your copies to finish, or get through a chapter while waiting for a meeting to start.



Make all of your copies at one time.

If you need several handouts for a lesson, make them all in a single trip.

Even better is to make all the copies you will need for the entire week at one time, even if it means having to make half, let someone else go, and them make the rest. That's why you travel with your reading.





Do most of your paperwork at your mailbox.

Do it right there at your mailbox and forward it on to the proper person.

Many times we get paperwork in our mailboxes and take it back to our classrooms or offices only to misplace it or otherwise not complete the paperwork. A better strategy is to never let it leave the office. If you need materials (your grade book for instance) to complete the paperwork, leave the paperwork in your mailbox and finish it the next time you are in the office.



Use waiting time wisely.

Keep a running list of quick things that need to be done close by.

While waiting for a parent conference, meeting, etc. try to accomplish those small, "interruptible" tasks such as creating a new seating chart, grading papers, reading catalogues, or cutting out letters for your next bulletin board.



Plan Phone-Calls.

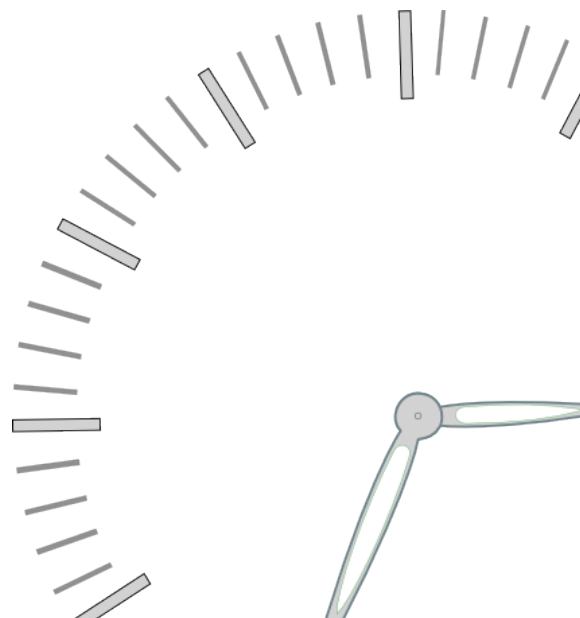
When making phone calls, write down the points you want to discuss ahead of time so you can "get to the point" as well as remember what you wanted to talk about.

Keep a log of phone calls made to parents.

You can make a form which includes the name of the student, phone number, reason called, results. This way, you not only have a record of the call, all the information you need for any next steps (i.e. follow up calls, conferences, IEP or 504 annual review meetings, etc.) is in one place.

Don't take papers home to grade.

I know that sounds sacrilegious, but let's be honest. Half the time we take papers home, we are merely taking them for a ride because we never do get around to grading them. Instead, the papers sit there in our bags, making us feel guilty about the work we are not getting done and keeping us from enjoying whatever we've decided to do instead. Better to come in early or stay later and grade at school than to bring the papers home.





Do not call out students' names in order to take roll.

Once students are at work, take roll. If you have a seating chart, you can see who is absent in one sweep.

Elementary teachers have many options: You can write each student's name on a clothes pin and pin it to a chart near the door. As students come in, they place their pin in a small bucket. Or, vice versa. The pins could be placed in the box and the student takes his or hers out and places it on the chart. (Especially useful if you have to do a lunch/milk count.)

Use attendance clipboards.

Use removable adhesive hooks to hang rosters/attendance sheets for each of your classes on separate clipboards beside your classroom door. The attendance is always easy to find (or grab for a fire drill). When students come in late, have them sign themselves in and clip their pass to the clipboard. When you take attendance for the next class, highlight or circle any absences to keep “creative” students from altering your attendance records later!

Assign a number to each of your students at the beginning of the year.

The teacher is #1. Students can be numbered randomly, in alphabetical order, or even be given the number of their birth date.

If a student moves away, his/her number becomes available for the next student who enrolls. Here are some ways to use these numbers:

- Student texts are numbered.
- Then there is no need to write names in the texts.
- List students by number rather than alphabetically in your gradebook.
- Have each student write his/her number in the top right-hand corner of each page before it's turned in. As papers are handed in, students insert their paper in the right sequence in the pile. Then they're in order for recording in the gradebook.
- For fire drills or to check attendance, the teacher starts a count by saying "1" (the teacher's number). Students count out their numbers quickly and the teacher notes the number of anyone who's missing.
- Use the numbers to keep track of turns. For example, lines can start with #2 on the first day of the month, #3 on the second, etc.
- Have a can with a token in it for each number. If you need to choose a student for doing something special, draw a number for the lucky winner.



Create a generic "Classroom Procedures" list for substitutes.

Include schedules, important points to remember, the process of taking roll, etc. This can then be attached to specific lesson plans.

Make transparencies for directions to tasks.

This way you won't have to repeat yourself several times.

Make a checklist reference sheet for events.

For example, you may want to have a list for field trips. Include on the list everything that must be done before, during, and after the trip, then check off as completed. Make copies of your reference sheets and use them as necessary.

Create templates for materials you create regularly.

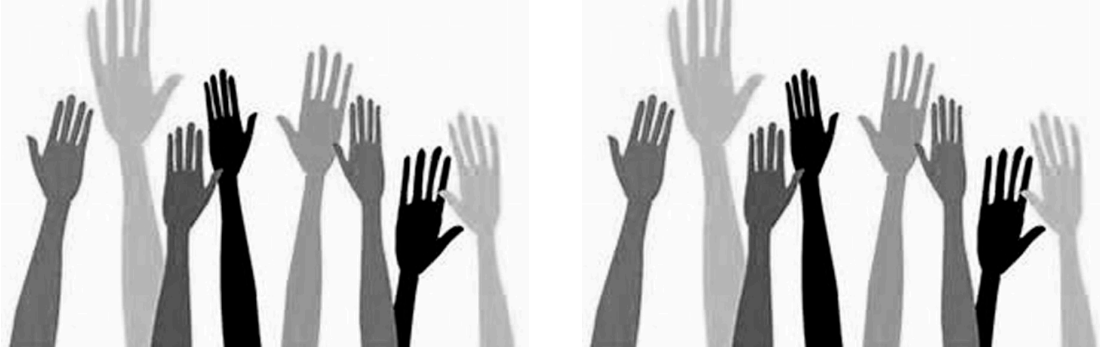
For example, you can store on your computer a lesson plan template, then use "save as" to name the lesson plan. Or, you can store a template for quizzes, handouts, spelling lists etc. That way, you don't have to recreate the document from scratch each time you need a new one.

Keep a file folder handy with extra copies of forms you normally use.

For example, keep extra copies of lunch counts, field-trip forms, blank order forms, etc. so that you don't need to look for a copy of the form you need every time you need one.

Keep a large calendar handy for noting make-up assignments for students who were absent.

Instruct students to check the calendar when they return from an absence. Place any materials they will need near the calendar. Assign one student to be "in charge" of telling returning students what they missed. If you are a middle school or high school teacher, make a file folder for each of your classes and put the missing student's work in the folder with his or her name on it. Tell students that it will be their responsibility to check the appropriate folder when they return.



Allow students to create one or more bulletin boards.

Most children enjoy this.

Assign tasks to students.

If a student can do the job just as well as you can, then let her or him do it. Most students love having responsibilities. Some teachers for example, have a classroom librarian whose job it is to be in charge of the classroom library. They shelve and straighten books, recommend titles, and keep the area organized.

Offer Coupons.

For students who occasionally miss assignments, prepare a coupon that can be stapled to a late assignment turned in no later than the following school day. There is no penalty in this case, and no excuse is required. Copy the coupons on bright paper and give one to each child on the first day of school and on the first day of each succeeding quarter. The expiration date is the last day of school. Students who are able to save one or more of their coupons until the last week of school and who have no late work can redeem them during the last week of school for some special reward or treat.

Allow students to check their own work.

For formative assignments, allow students to check their own work. There's no real incentive to cheat because no grades are given on these. The object is to prepare for the test, when the grade really counts. Many students actually like this and actually work harder than before. It helps them view learning as a process. Once the students have checked their answers, ask, "How many of you got 100% on the ones you finished? Good, give yourselves a pat on the back. How many of you missed only one? How many missed more than one?" Make a mental note of the children who missed more than one. They may need special attention or additional instruction.

Pull out of storage all material that you will be distributing that day and place it in one area.

Think through the lessons you will be doing and what materials you will need for each one. You may want to assign a student assistant to distribute material for you (makers, rulers, art paper, newspapers). Talk with the student about how to distribute the material and how to pick it up and put it in its proper place. Some teachers find it handy to have a number of small containers and fill each one with the needed materials for each student. (For example, they will place in the container a pair of scissors, glue stick, markers, etc.) They then simply distribute the containers.



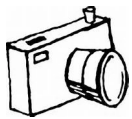
Never write another hall pass.

Post a sample hall pass on a small poster at the front of the classroom using your school's format. Let students know that they need to write their own passes and come to you only for a signature.



Create a Late Work form.

Make it a policy when assignments are due that everyone turns in something. Students who don't have their work should pick up a Late Work form from the student zone, fill it out and turn it in. You might want to include a space for the student name, assignment title, due date, reason it isn't complete, and student signature. Late work forms reassure you that you didn't lose an assignment (and eliminate students' claims that you did) and make a great record for conferences when students make a habit of missing work.



Create a picture perfect classroom.

Take a few digital photos of your classroom looking exactly as you want it – desks straightened, bookshelves tidy, floors clear of trash, etc. Post the pictures around the room or display them on an interactive white board and have students spend a couple of minutes every few weeks sharing the responsibility for keeping the room picture perfect. And, before you dismiss the students have them look around their desks and pick up any trash, papers, or items on the floor. You can assign one student to pick up "wandering items" and put them in their proper place.

Set up teacher space/student space zones.

Reserve your desk and a table or shelf as teacher-only spaces. Let students know that they should never move or use items from these areas so that your papers stay organized and just as you left them. In another area of the room, create a space for students with staplers, pencil sharpener, trays to turn in work, folders with extra copies of assignments, a calendar, and a can for all the pens and pencils you pick up off the floor at the end of the day. Students never need to interrupt instruction or ask for these items.

Make a student supply center.

Keep a small area set aside where you store often-used supplies for students to use. (This also helps keep them from taking things from your desk.) Also, keep a supply of notebook paper handy. Tell students they make take a sheet when necessary.

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