



SECTION ONE

Get a Good Start in Your New Vocation

In this section, you will learn

- ✓ How to avoid ruining your career
- ✓ How to be the best teacher you can
- ✓ How to promote your new profession
- ✓ How to boost your confidence
- ✓ How to establish a discussion group

“Welcome Back!” Those signs in schools across the nation apply to teachers, too—especially new teachers. As a first-year teacher, you will have an exciting and memorable year. You will face new challenges and have lots of fun with your students.

Fun? Yes, teaching is fun. Many teachers have fun every day at school, contrary to what many people think. Believing that teaching cannot be fun is just one of the many ways that people hold misconceptions about teaching. As a new teacher, you will join millions of others in a profession that is probably one of the most universally misunderstood.

The rest of the world believes that teachers enjoy short hours and long summer vacations, that we must have taken courses in how to answer seemingly endless questions with unflinching patience, that we enjoy eating in a cafeteria with children who left their table manners at home, that we must like wearing clothes stained with red ink, crayon, and chalk.

The rest of the world doesn't know that teachers spend their free time grading papers, writing lesson plans, and taking classes for recertification. The rest of the world does not realize how hard it is to find words that can inspire as well as scold. The rest of the world does not understand that teachers weep when a school erupts in violence, because it could have been their school, any school.

Your life as a new teacher will be a paradox. You will have to be strict and loving at the same time. You will be exhausted and exhilarated. Best of all, you will receive more than you can ever give, no matter how generous you are.

As a teacher, you will never be rich, even if your district has the wisdom to offer you a signing bonus. However, you will be rewarded repeatedly because you will help students achieve their dreams, and in doing so, you will achieve your own. Teachers don't just "touch the future," as bumper stickers promise; education is far more than that. Teachers see the promise of the future in the unruly classrooms of the present.

It's not easy being a teacher. You will need to develop heroic qualities: the stamina of an Olympic athlete, the diplomacy of a head of state, and the courage of a soldier. It is a tremendous challenge, but other teachers have done it, and so can you. After all, someone had to teach those other heroes. Olympic athletes, heads of state, and soldiers are not just born that way. Standing behind them—behind every hero—is another hero: a teacher.

Welcome to your new vocation.

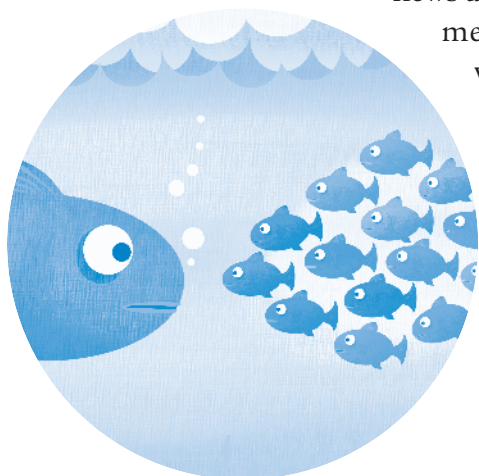
Your Teaching Career: The Good News

"You're a teacher? Boy, I don't see how you do it. I could never be a teacher." Perhaps you have already heard this several times since you announced that you have signed a teaching contract. Media reports are full of grim news about the teacher shortage, embarrassingly low teacher salaries, controversies over standards and standardized testing, and, worst of all, school violence.

While these reports are not exaggerations, there is a great deal of unreported good news about education. Day after day, well-behaved children learn what they are expected to learn—and even exceed their teachers' expectations. There are many positive aspects to being a teacher:

You are part of a large supportive team of caring professionals. The good news about being a teacher today is that you are not alone. Teachers are members of a team of supportive adults who care about and work with all students in a school. Depending on the size of your school and your district's policies, you may work with social service workers, support committees, student mentors, parole officers, counselors, or other caring adults.

You have access to an increasing amount of educational research. Since the 1970s, there has been an enormous increase in educational research. Because of this extensive research, we can better understand students' differing needs. Educators can quickly find solutions to many of the problems that teachers face



every day. We now know that teachers play a much more important role in shaping students' futures than we once thought. Another benefit of this increased research is that much of it is available online or through conferences, professional organizations, or books.

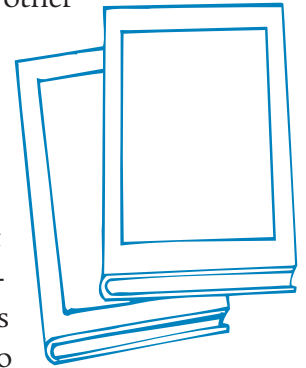
You have access to technology that can connect you and your students to the world.

One of the best things about being a teacher in the new millennium is the technology available for educators. Not only do we have access to sophisticated technology, but so do our students. Even if there is a shortage of equipment in your school, there are remedies to this problem. Along with the advances in equipment, there are countless education resource sites on the Internet that give you access to hundreds of thousands of other teachers who are willing to share ideas and who are just a few keystrokes away. You can visit Web sites, read blogs, and find innovative lesson plans and materials online.

You can rise to the challenge of the No Child Left Behind Act. One of the most controversial education topics in recent years is implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the accountability measures that accompany it. Although coverage of this issue tends to be sensational and negative, much about NCLB is positive. While school districts are under enormous pressure to improve academic performance, students and teachers who rise to the challenge of closing the achievement gap can only be enriched by their efforts.

Today's teachers reach out to all students. In years past, educators reflected the social climate of their time by not fully including all children in the education process. Students were discriminated against because of many factors, including gender, race, ability, and national origin. Today's teachers include all students in their instructional efforts. We even teach the children who make it clear to everyone around them that they are not interested in an education.

The best reason to teach is the simplest: children. Although the preceding examples of the recent news in education are positive ones, they are not the best feature of your new career. The very best news about the teaching profession is that you get to be with children all day long. Whether the children in your class are bored seniors or energetic kindergartners, they are still the best reasons to go to school each day.



Core Values of Professional Educators

No matter where or when teachers gather, inevitably the conversations all seem to revolve around the same topics: students and classroom issues. Why does this remarkable similarity occur? It is not a coincidence that teachers everywhere have the same concerns and interests. While our students and schools may be very different, the same core values shape our teaching experiences. Here are the essential beliefs, the core values of professional educators:

- ▶ All children can learn; however, not all children learn at the same rate or in the same way.
- ▶ Lowered expectations kill the hope of success.

- ▶ Success breeds success in the classroom as well as in life.
- ▶ All teachers are role models all the time.
- ▶ The three P's of success are planning, preparation, and prevention.
- ▶ Teachers control what happens in a classroom, the good as well as the bad.
- ▶ Teachers can make a difference in the life of a child.

You Are Not Alone

Given the purpose of your work and the diverse personalities, needs, and backgrounds of your students, problems are inevitable. Some will be simple to resolve, others will take longer, and still others will not have workable solutions. To examine your assumptions about problems you may have as you begin your teaching career, use Self-Assessment 1.1.

**When you have a bad day,
know in your heart that you
did something to affect a
student in a positive way.**

*—Nancy Parker,
31 years' experience*

On the days when your life as a teacher seems beset with serious problems, take comfort in knowing that you are not alone. All teachers have problems. First-year teachers, experienced teachers, teachers at every grade level and every ability level have to cope with problems, no matter how ideal their school situation.

Anytime you feel overwhelmed, remember that all teachers have had to deal with what you are going through. The following problems are ones that all teachers experience:

- Stacks of tedious paperwork
- Fatigue and burnout
- Frequent class interruptions
- Difficulty in contacting parents
- Not enough equipment or materials
- Students with overwhelming family problems
- The threat of school violence
- Uncertainty about the right course of action to take
- A culture or generation gap with students
- Not enough productive time with students
- Lack of practical solutions to discipline problems
- Overcrowded classrooms



SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.1

What Are Your Assumptions About Teaching?

Below you will find some common assumptions that many first-year teachers make about teaching.

- ✓ Put a checkmark in the box beside each statement that you think is valid.
- ✓ Check the information at the end to see how much you really know about your new profession.

- ☐ 1. It's important that my students like me.
- ☐ 2. The advice that more experienced teachers have been giving me—"Don't smile until Thanksgiving"—makes sense.
- ☐ 3. Lawsuits happen to other teachers.
- ☐ 4. Many of my students come from broken homes with busy parents who do not take an active interest in what is happening at school.
- ☐ 5. All year will be as tough as the first semester.

How Veteran Teachers View Popular Assumptions

1. **It's important that my students like me.** We all want our students to like us. However, as a teacher, you will often have to ask students to do things they do not want to do. You will also have to enforce rules they must follow. It is not your role to be a student's well-liked friend. It is important that students respect you and your role as a teacher, too. Work to maintain a balance between students' liking you and students' respecting you.
2. **The advice that more experienced teachers have been giving me—"Don't smile until Thanksgiving"—makes sense.** Why shouldn't you smile? No one likes a grouch. Besides, students will not respond any better or behave any better if you show no sense of enjoyment in teaching them and being with them. Balance the need to be strict with a cheerful presence.
3. **Lawsuits happen to other teachers.** Lawsuits are one of the hazards of modern life, and teachers are not exempt from the threat. Do not be lulled into thinking that a lawsuit can't happen to you. You can protect yourself by keeping your documentation in order and by being professional in your conduct at all times.
4. **Many of my students come from broken homes with busy parents who do not take an active interest in what is happening at school.** You should not assume that single parents or guardians are less concerned about their children than other parents. Parents or guardians who are too busy to be concerned about their child's welfare, fortunately, are very rare. Treat all students and their parents or guardians with consistent and respectful dignity.
5. **All year will be as tough as the first semester.** The first few months of any job are the most difficult. Every day of your first semester and first year will be an opportunity for you to learn and grow. Although neither activity is always comfortable, before long you will be handling your role as a teacher with confidence and ease.

You Are the Solution

While some people believe that schools are hotbeds of social, behavioral, and academic problems, you are the solution to those problems. While it is exciting to think of the powerful influence you can have on your students, it is just as unnerving to accept the challenges that accompany your importance.

Countless studies have proved that teachers are the most significant factor in any student's schooling. Although you may be tempted to think that sports, peer pressure, or a student's physical environment have more influence than you do, consider the many ways in which you play a role in your students' lives:

- ▶ Inspiring students to believe they can achieve their goals and dreams
- ▶ Keeping defenseless students safe from bullies
- ▶ Encouraging a lifelong interest in learning
- ▶ Guiding students in building a better life
- ▶ Offering comfort and guidance
- ▶ Teaching students to read, to write, to think
- ▶ Modeling how to be a good citizen and a successful adult
- ▶ Helping students believe in themselves
- ▶ Encouraging students who get little encouragement elsewhere



A teacher's influence is often subtle and immeasurable. Nevertheless, if you doubt your importance in the lives of your students, think for a moment about a teacher who inspired you by making it clear that you had the power within you to succeed. Use Self-Assessments 1.2 and 1.3 to reflect on the qualities you can draw on to help you inspire the next generation of students.

One day in the cafeteria, I noticed a young man who was not his usual fun self. I walked by, stopped, and asked him quietly if everything was all right. He said yes, but I knew it wasn't. I told him he knew where I was if he needed me, then moved on. The next morning, I found a note on my desk, all folded, teen style. In the note, this young man thanked me for asking him if he was OK. He said he had been struggling with some very hard news and was really thinking of doing something stupid, but I had made him rethink his decision. I was awed at the power. As teachers, we never, ever know the full extent of our effect on those lives entrusted to us. We must truly exercise caution in how we interact with young people. I carry that note, now twenty years old, in my wallet every day of my life, to remind me of this moment. The good news: this young man is now a productive member of our community with a lovely wife (who was also my student) and three great children. What greater reward could any teacher desire?

—Luann Scott, 31 years' experience

SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.2

Character Traits of Successful Teachers

Place a checkmark in the box beside each character trait you already possess. After you have made this quick self-assessment, look over the list again to determine how to develop other characteristics that will help you become a competent, successful teacher.

Successful teachers are

- ☐ Patient with their students, their colleagues, and themselves
- ☐ Able to let their students know they care about them
- ☐ Energetic and willing to work
- ☐ Able to engage children whose attention span is brief
- ☐ Optimistic that what they do today affects the future
- ☐ Successful at listening to students both in groups and individually
- ☐ Able to make quick decisions on a variety of issues all day long
- ☐ Enthusiastic about their subject matter and about their students
- ☐ Efficient at planning, organizing, and managing time
- ☐ Not afraid to ask for help



SELF-ASSESSMENT 1.3

How Will You Rate as a Teacher?

Before you begin, remember that good teachers are not just born that way; instead, they make deliberate choices to become the teachers that they are. You can do the same. As a first-year teacher, you should commit yourself to developing as many of the following qualities as possible as quickly as you can. See where your strengths lie and which qualities you need to develop further by following these steps:

1. Put a checkmark in the box before each characteristic in the following list that applies to you every day that you are at school.
2. When you are finished, total the number of checkmarks.
3. See the rankings at the end of the assessment to see how you rate.

Good teachers:

- ☐ Enjoy their students
- ☐ Inspire their students to want to know more
- ☐ Return papers promptly
- ☐ Use a variety of interesting activities in a lesson
- ☐ Keep students engaged in meaningful work throughout class
- ☐ Make sure students know how to do an assignment well
- ☐ Know their subject matter
- ☐ Are a reliable role model
- ☐ Maintain an orderly classroom
- ☐ Are prepared to teach every student every day
- ☐ See themselves as part of a team
- ☐ Commit themselves to professionalism
- ☐ Make their students feel capable
- ☐ Handle paperwork efficiently
- ☐ Stay open-minded



Total number of checkmarks: _____

How to Use Your Results

13–15: You are on the right track! Keep up the good work!

11–12: Begin by choosing one or two qualities to improve. Make a plan, set your goals, and work to develop all the attributes of a successful teacher.

10 or less: Remember that improving your performance as a teacher takes time and deliberate choices. Begin by selecting the qualities that are most important to you right now. Set your goals for developing each one.

How to Avoid Ruining Your Career

As a first-year teacher, you will make many mistakes. Some of these mistakes will be small ones: a poorly worded question on a quiz, a misplaced teacher's edition, a misspelled word on a handout. While such mistakes are an unavoidable part of your learning process, other mistakes are serious ones that could jeopardize your career. Just like the small mistakes, these serious mistakes may seem expedient or not very important at the time, but you should never doubt that they are indeed grave errors that can cause irrevocable harm. Follow these suggestions to avoid the possibility of ruining your career:

- ▶ Don't allow small problems to become large ones.
- ▶ Don't refuse to honor school rules even if you don't agree with them.
- ▶ Don't touch a student in any way that could possibly be misconstrued.
- ▶ Don't model a lack of integrity. Follow the rules for photocopying material and showing movies at school.
- ▶ Don't ever leave your students unsupervised.
- ▶ Don't overlook serious student problems such as substance abuse or bullying.
- ▶ Don't give students free time in which they have nothing to do.
- ▶ Don't allow students to harass each other or to engage in horseplay.
- ▶ Don't agree "not to tell" when a student tells you confidential information. You may be required to report it to an administrator or counselor.
- ▶ Don't neglect to monitor students who are engaged in a strenuous activity.
- ▶ Don't allow a student to leave the school with an adult who is not legally authorized to take the child.
- ▶ Don't break laws on confidentiality and privacy of student information.
- ▶ Don't neglect to learn and abide by school policies and procedures.
- ▶ Don't act in anger.
- ▶ Don't be inconsistent in implementing your behavior policies.
- ▶ Don't call in sick when you are not.

Love every child. *Your love may be the only love some children get.* Remember that many, if not most of the children you teach, bring a lot of baggage to school that was never even close to being a part of your world growing up and that you don't understand. Teach them anyway.

—Charlene Herrala, 24 years' experience

How to Be the Best Teacher You Can Be

How can you develop into the kind of teacher you want to be? The answer is simple: be a student again.

Just as you worked hard to be an excellent student, you will now have to work to be an excellent teacher. Both endeavors require the same skills. Study, concentrate on your objectives, believe in yourself, seek help, do your homework, work well with others, take notes, and, above all, pay attention to the excellent teachers all around you!

Ten Skills All Teachers Should Have

In addition to the innate and learned characteristics that all teachers need, there are many skills that all teachers should develop as quickly as possible.

Teachers should be able to

1. Break down material in a variety of ways appropriate to the age and abilities of their students
2. See past a misbehavior to the whole child
3. Establish goals and set priorities for their students and themselves
4. Encourage, inspire, and chastise all at the same time
5. Make quick adjustments when a lesson is not working well
6. Treat all students with affection even when they misbehave
7. Diagnose and remediate a child's learning difficulties
8. Work with parents and other caring adults on behalf of students
9. Multitask in front of a crowd
10. Find joy in being with their students

How to Promote Your New Profession

Similar to those working in other occupations, educators are expected to be cheerleaders for their school, their students, their co-workers—in short, for their profession. Showing your enthusiastic and positive attitude can only enhance your ability to work well with others. Here are a few ways to promote your new profession (and enhance your own image as a caring teacher):

- Shop and transact other business in the community where you teach. Become part of community life.

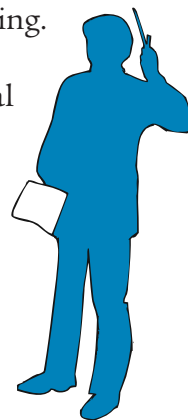
- ▶ Leave your complaints about school at school. People who are not involved with your school district should not hear indiscriminate negative comments about area schools, teachers, and, especially, students. Be positive instead.
- ▶ Attend school events, and be sure to take friends and family members with you.
- ▶ When you send information home, proofread it to make sure it is well expressed and professional.
- ▶ If you can take your students on field trips in the community, do so. Let the members of your community see how well behaved local children can be.

Common-Sense Steps to Boost Your Confidence

As you go through the first year of your new career, there may be times when you lose confidence in yourself and in the choice you made to be a teacher. Such a lack of confidence is stressful and may cause you to consider other, less rewarding professions.

You can do many things to reassure yourself about how well you are adjusting to the changes of a new career. Follow these suggestions, and enjoy the rewards they will bring.

- ▶ **Dress the part.** If you look like a veteran educator, then your professional image will speak for you in the moments when you are too shy, overwhelmed, or uncertain to think of just the right things to say.
- ▶ **Be prepared for class.** There is a great sense of accomplishment in knowing that you are prepared for questions, have the correct number of hand-outs, and know just how to interest your students in the day's lesson.
- ▶ **Listen more than you speak.** This does not mean that you should never speak up; it just means that the veteran teachers around you have a great deal to offer to novice teachers who are willing to listen to what they have to say.
- ▶ **Keep it simple at first.** Do not plan elaborate class activities such as lengthy collaborative learning exercises or overnight field trips until you have gotten to know your students well enough and have enough experience to ensure that the activities will be successful.
- ▶ **Pay attention to your successes.** It is very easy to dwell on your failings at work. Make a conscious effort to focus on the improvements you make in your first year. Keep a list of the things you did correctly each week, or reward yourself when you have mastered a professional goal.
- ▶ **Seek support from your colleagues.** Novice and veteran teachers all can offer encouragement and advice. Often it is comforting to know that other teachers are experiencing the same problems. Use the “Talk It Over” information at the end of each section of this resource to create your own discussion group or join an online forum.
- ▶ **Set professional goals for yourself.** By setting goals, you will not only improve your teaching skills, but you will also give yourself a psychological boost because you will



Enjoy this time. Teaching can be a lot of fun when you connect with a student. Do not expect instant payback. You are laying the foundation for years to come both in and out of school.

—Edward Gardner,
36 years' experience

feel a greater sense of control over your professional life. Keep your goals manageable, and track your progress.

- ▶ **Stay organized!** When you are organized at work, you will avoid many stressful situations because you will be in control of your environment and you will appear competent and professional.
- ▶ **Smile and act as if you have things under control.** Your students do not need to know that you are having a bad day. They just want a teacher who is in control of the class.
- ▶ **See opportunities instead of disasters.** You will need to develop an optimistic and resilient attitude in order to feel confident as a teacher. Instead of dwelling on your mistakes or on what went wrong during the day, see such occasions for what they really are: opportunities to learn and grow.



Talk It Over

How to Get a Good Start in Your New Vocation

According to conventional wisdom, you will learn more from other teachers than from any other source. To become the kind of teacher you want to be, you should develop strong professional relationships with other teachers. Even the most experienced teacher cannot do his or her job without the support of others. Every successful professional needs a supportive working environment.

Unfortunately, one of the biggest hurdles that novice teachers face is a lack of this necessary support. The isolation that can accompany a teaching career is especially evident in the first few years when teachers are adjusting to their new profession. Being out of the loop can be a drawback for anyone, but it is especially detrimental to inexperienced teachers, who stand to benefit most from the support of friendly, knowledgeable colleagues.

Look past your department or grade level to see just how many colleagues you really have. Every adult involved in education is a potential source of support; mentors, outstanding teachers, other new teachers, teachers in other grade levels, or even people you meet at conventions or conferences can be part of your professional support network.

When you do create a supportive network, you will benefit in several ways:

- ▶ Other teachers will have many of the same problems you experience and can offer insights and solutions.

- ▶ Other teachers can reinforce your idealism with their own.
- ▶ Other teachers will understand your successes and failures, your joys and frustrations.
- ▶ Other teachers will offer a new perspective as they share strategies, techniques, and advice.

Fortunately, it is easier than ever to form professional relationships with other educators. An excellent way to connect with teachers in school districts across the nation is through an online blog, chat room, or discussion forum. One advantage of this method is that teachers everywhere share many of the same experiences, so you can receive insights from a wide range of perspectives and look at local problems from a fresh point of view. If you are interested in trying this type of networking, here are two excellent online sites to explore:



- **A to Z Teacher Stuff (<http://forums.atozteacherstuff.com>).** This discussion site is teacher-designed and teacher-friendly. Anyone can view a forum posting, but to reply or post your own new topic, you must register. Follow the helpful guidelines and tips to start connecting with other teachers across the nation.
- **Editorial Projects in Education Blogboard (<http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/blogboard/>).** Part of a larger site maintained by Editorial Projects in Education, which publishes *Education Week* and *Teacher Magazine*, among others, this site offers links to dozens of interesting blogs about current educational issues.

A second way to form strong professional relationships with your colleagues is to establish a discussion group with some of your co-workers. You will learn a great deal if you can meet regularly to discuss common concerns. A local teacher discussion group could center on a shared discipline, shared students, or shared interests. Here are some suggestions for creating your own local discussion group:

- ▶ Begin with just a few people, so that everyone's opinion matters.
- ▶ Establish a regular meeting time and place. Set the times when your meeting will begin and end. Weekly meetings that last thirty minutes will be more effective than monthly meetings that are so long that everyone loses interest.
- ▶ Set ground rules about acceptable topics; for example, the meetings should not be gripe sessions but discussions whose purpose is to study school-related topics.
- ▶ Arrange a system in which group members share responsibility for facilitating the meetings.
- ▶ For best results, determine the topics you want to discuss in advance of the meeting, so that all of the participants have a chance to think about them and can come prepared to share.
- ▶ You do not have to limit your group to faculty members. Consider involving other interested staff members when appropriate.

Although the specific topics of discussion will reflect the makeup of the group, some of the topics you should consider talking about include innovative lesson plans and materials, classroom management strategies, how to develop collaborative lessons, current educational issues, and solutions for school problems.

At the end of each section of this resource, you will find a list of ten discussion questions specific to the material in that section to talk over with your colleagues. You can use these questions as a springboard for discussions that will help you and your discussion group members grow and develop professionally.

Discuss these questions about your new vocation:

1. What qualities have you observed that allow teachers to be successful? Share your beliefs about good teachers.
2. What are your professional goals this term? What plans do you need to make in order to achieve them? How can your colleagues help?
3. When have you experienced the most growth as a teacher? What did you learn that helped you grow?
4. Talk about a person in your building whom you admire. What have you learned from this person?
5. What can you do to boost your confidence in your ability to be a competent teacher? What actions can you take to develop the confidence you need?
6. Categorize the ways in which good teachers are also good students. What can you learn from this?
7. Which teachers in your past empowered you to believe in yourself? How can you model your own career on this inspiration?
8. What meaning does the expression “teaching is a deliberate act” hold for you? What can you conclude about successful teachers from this statement?
9. Compile a list of problems you can anticipate as you begin your career. How can you begin to cope with them? Work together to brainstorm possible solutions for each one.
10. What beliefs about teaching do you share with the colleagues in your discussion group? How do your beliefs differ? How can you learn from each other?

