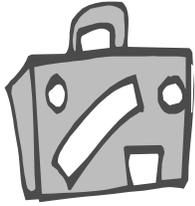


Quick Start Guide to Teaching

By National Board Certified Teacher and Scholastic Playwright Mack Lewis



Pack Your Bags!

Even the dumpiest old classroom looks like green pastures to a new teacher. But will it still be so in ten years?

How about thirty? Prospective teachers can't be too choosy, but that doesn't mean your first teaching job needs to be your last. Teaching contracts, retirement benefits, home purchases, and personal relationships tend to anchor you in one place. Once you've taught about seven years it becomes cost prohibitive to change districts. Once you've taught ten, a change of district likely means postponing retirement. Look carefully at the community and the school district in which you want to teach to make sure it meets your long-term requirements. If you've always dreamed of Big Sky Country, the time to start looking is now.

Party!

Work relationships contribute mightily to job satisfaction, yet some teachers invest little effort in developing them. Eat lunch in the staff room, attend staff functions, and by all means go to the Christmas party. "Partying" with your fellow staffers doesn't mean you have to compromise your values, but it does mean committing time to getting to know them. As a new teacher it is especially important. Be sure also to seek advice from your peers even if you don't really need it, and to honor their methodology even if it doesn't suit you.

Invest Wisely!

Teaching is impossible unless you learn to prioritize. Teachers who don't figure this out quickly are headed for burn-out and an early exit from the profession. Evaluate your practice

the way a successful businessman would. What return on your investment of time and energy are you getting from any given task? One easy area to trim is that of grading. Traditionally assessing every worksheet does not pay dividends. Instead, consider alternative forms of assessment such as peer discussion, or even chuck the homework into the recycle bin. Just as a baseball coach doesn't keep track of a player's slugging percentage during batting practice, you needn't grade all your students' work. Look at school and district expectations the same way. What do your peers, parents, and admins truly value? Invest your energy there.



Watch the Clock!

A committed educator could work a fifteen hour day and still not feel "caught up."

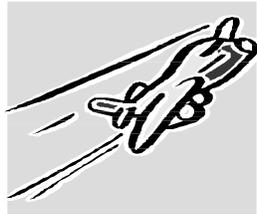
Consequently, teachers tend to take home too much work. If you're piling work into a cardboard box, recycling bin, or airline carry-on bag, you're headed for burn-out. Get a briefcase or backpack and resolve never to take home anything that doesn't fit inside. Give yourself a time limit for doing work at home. Also set a time at which you will always leave your classroom. Assuming you've prioritized your tasks, if something doesn't get done within those limits it can probably wait.



Be a Techie!

Today's kids know their electronic gadgets so they're not gonna be impressed with that IBM Selectric you typed your thesis on. To be tech-literate today means going well beyond word processing and checking your mail. Tech-savvy educators are finding ways to utilize everything from texts and tweets to YouTube and Skype. These

educators are valued by their admins, appreciated by their tech departments, and respected by their peers. Anytime an opportunity presents itself to advance technologically, click and go! The digital age is just beginning but its pioneers are not 49ers trudging across the continent to get to the gold mines—they're technonauts blasting off to new frontiers. Don't miss the flight.



Take Off!

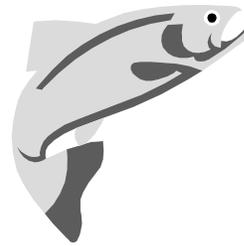
Save 10% of every paycheck and take a sabbatical every seven to ten years. My cooperating

teacher told me this in 1992. Had I followed her advice I could have spent a year teaching in Hawaii, Australia, or England. I could have accepted a Fulbright Scholarship, a Federal Teaching Ambassadorship, or a Manhattan internship. Or I could have spent a year building a cabin in the woods. Instead, I spent my seventh, eighth, and ninth year struggling with burn-out when a temporary change of pace might have been just the ticket to renew my teaching spirit! There are a host of opportunities available to teachers with the ability to escape the classroom for a year. Stash away that 10% and take advantage of them. And be sure to send me a postcard from Big Island!

Work the Room!

If you've ever watched a VIP enter a public meeting, you've seen someone "work the room." Teachers need to adopt this practice, but how do you work the room when you're an unknown? You start by getting known. Volunteer for committees and activities where you'll have contact with district administrators, school board members, and community leaders. Be sure to do a great job, but put away any personal agendas and focus instead on building genuine relationships. Be sure, too, to pursue publicity on behalf of your classroom and

students. Whenever you're doing anything even remotely unique, contact the media. If you carefully develop your "VIP status," it will serve you well.



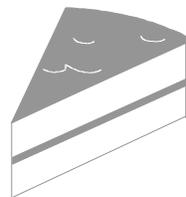
Swim with the Current!

Education is changing rapidly but you may not agree with all of it. Go into the profession knowing

you'll probably have to chuck most of what you remember about elementary school. Technology, culture, politics, and public health are reshaping classrooms and making traditional teaching models a thing of the past. There will be times when you want to rage against the machine, but your rage will lead only to dissatisfaction. Instead, embrace the future and find ways to make it work for you and your students.

Get Certified (For Real This Time)!

The bulk of your teacher education is going to happen in your student-teaching experience, but as a reflective educator, you'll never stop learning. Once you've survived the hard knocks of your first few years and developed your groove, look into National Board Certification. The process of pursuing your Board Certification will not only make you a more reflective, more focused educator, it will also add to your portfolio of respect within the industry. National Board Certification is what your teacher-ed program should be but wasn't.



Avoid Twinkies!

The Twinkies are calling to you! And why shouldn't they? Teaching's a tough job. As much energy as you're burning, a Twinkie or two will practically evaporate in your system, right? Not a chance. Staff rooms are notorious for being stocked

with empty calories, and because people tend to deal with stress and fatigue by snacking, teachers have to be extra careful. It is imperative you eat well and make time for real exercise. If not, you could easily end up one of those teachers who make it to retirement only to be hobbled by health problems. No matter how svelte you are now, ignore the siren song of the Staff Room Twinkie.



Kiss!

My graduate tuition was well-spent if for no other reason than the acronym KISS: "Keep it simple, Stupid."

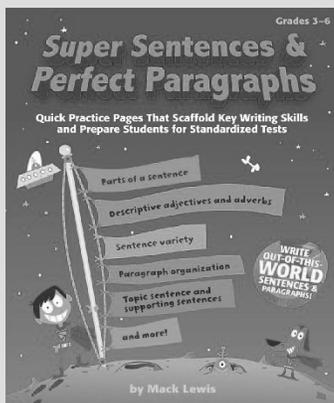
Teachers have, on average, less than 5 minutes of prep time for every 20 minute lesson. Just five minutes to plan, prepare, grade, and reflect. Consequently, every lesson you plan must meet the KISS standards. Simplicity & Sustainability should be your mantra whenever planning a unit. Consider the movie *Freedom Writers*, a true story about a California teacher who went above and beyond the call of duty. She worked extra jobs to provide inner-city students with

literature and devoted nearly every-waking moment to her classroom. Her dedication was commendable and it garnered her a lot of attention, but it was completely unsustainable. Not only did she sacrifice her marriage, she also lasted in the profession less than three years.

Teach Real Life!

Make your classroom a place of Grace & Edification! What you're trying to do for your students isn't about report cards, grade books, or standardized test scores. The real success comes when a student gets a kick out of what he or she has written, or when a kid cries at the end of *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Instead of using your grade book to smack kids down, use your classroom to build kids up. After all, the grade on a spelling test isn't all that significant in the grand scheme of things. It's merely a tiny little blip in life lessons about work ethic, self-esteem, decision-making, courage . . . Remember, you're not teaching third grade. You're teaching people. Prepare your students for real life. ★

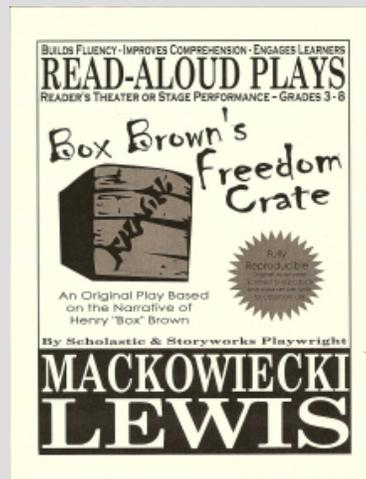
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by National Board Certified teacher and Scholastic author Mack Lewis

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