THE NEW
TEACHER

CHECKLIST

THE NEW TEACHER CHECKLIST

By Jennifer Gonzalez

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INTRODUCTION

As a new teacher, you have a lot to learn in a short period of time. This checklist will provide a structure to follow as you progress through the school year.

Some items may not apply to your situation, and there may be other things you need to add, but this covers a whole lot of what you'll need to learn, decide, find, or set up to run a functioning classroom.

Keep in mind that you don't need to know all of this information on the first day! You'll drive yourself crazy if you try to find it all; just work through it a little at a time.

Whether you're brand-new to the classroom, starting in a new school, or just wanting to get yourself organized, this checklist will support you.

BINDER

If your school doesn't already require a specific organizational system, here's one you can use: Get a 3-ring binder, 1" or 1.5" thick (needs to be thin enough to easily slip into a bag you can take home), and a set of tabbed dividers (about 15-20 of these so you can adjust over the year). If you prefer to use a digital tool like Evernote or OneNote to organize this information, it can easily be replicated there.

Below is a suggested set of labels; you will eventually settle into your own system, but this will get you started:

- **Week at-a-Glance**
  Put an overview of the current week's plans in front; organize others behind it.

- **Attendance**
  If you normally record attendance on your computer or other digital interface, this may not be necessary; some teachers prefer to keep their own written records in addition to computer-based records.

- **Seating Charts**

- **Subject or Class Periods**
  For elementary, create one tab for each subject area. For secondary, one tab for each class period. Here you may choose to store lesson plans for individual class periods or subjects, along with original copies of handouts or other materials necessary for the lesson.

- **Faculty Meetings**
  Agendas and notes taken during faculty meetings.

- **PLC/Department Info**
  Same as above for your PLC or department- or grade-level meetings.

- **School Information**
  Schedules, phone extension lists, policies you might need to refer to.

- **District Information**
  Only include items that you'd need to refer to on a regular basis, such as the district calendar. Store everything else in your filing system (next section).

- **Standards/Curriculum**
  If the full version of these is too lengthy to keep in the binder, look for a shorter version or summary page for reference. If you find this isn't helpful, keep standards in their own separate binder.

- **Notes for Next Year**
  This is crucial for your first year, but many teachers keep notes like these throughout their careers as they reflect on improvements they can make. Just fill this section with blank computer paper or lined paper—you'll fill it quickly!

FILING SYSTEM

The binder will be a great place to keep current materials and forms for reference, but it is unreasonable to keep everything there. Set up a filing system to store documents that are more than a month old or that you don't expect you'll need anytime soon. If possible, mirror your digital files with these same categories as well, since many documents will come to you in digital format.

- **Lesson Plans**
  File past lesson plans in chronological order.

- **Attendance**
  Past attendance records, to keep your binder light. If you only use digital systems to record attendance, this may not be necessary.

- **Student Files**
  Create one file for each student. Use these to store sample work and any other documentation such as discipline records, IEP paperwork, parent contact notes, or notes from that student.

- **One file for each subject (elementary) or class period (middle/secondary)**

- **Faculty Meetings**
  Use this to store old agendas, handouts, and other notes for faculty meetings after the section in your binder gets too full.

- **PLC/Department Info**

- **School Information**

- **District Information**

- **Standards/Curriculum**

- **Notes for Next Year**

- **Employment/Certification**
  Keep records of your contract, pay stubs, your teaching certificate and any other information related to your teaching job here. You may prefer to keep these at home instead—just be sure to have a file for this information somewhere.

- **Mailers**
  You are going to get a lot of junk mail: flyers and promotional materials from textbook companies, free samples, information on PD opportunities, conferences, and memberships, and you'll get a lot in your email inbox as well. You won't have enough time to go through it all, so discard anything you know you'll never be interested in and put everything that looks promising in this file. Over the summer you can go through it and follow up on the good stuff.

SCHOOL

Here's a whole bunch of information you'll need to eventually find out. Once you do, record it here, even if you have it in your phone.

- The school's main phone number:

  _____

- The school's mailing address:

  _____

  _____

- The school's fax number:

  _____

- Learn the procedure for clocking in/signing in (if applicable)

- Find your mailbox

- **Supplies**

    - How do you order supplies?

    - What is your budget?

    - Does your school allow you to spend your own money on supplies and get reimbursed? Most don't, but some have a small budget for this purpose.

    - What supplies, if any, are available to teachers for free? Where are these kept?

- **Copies**
    - Where do you go to make copies?
    - Do you need any kind of code or password to use the copier?
    - Do teachers have a copy limit for the year?
    - Who do you go to if there is a paper jam or other problem with the copier?

- **Technology**
    - What is your email address for school use? How do you log in to access your email?
    - Do you have a teacher web page? If so, what are the expectations for maintaining it?
    - What kind of hardware is available to students (Computer labs? Tablets? Laptop cart?) and what is the procedure for accessing it? Is there a sign-up sheet? Do you need to check things out? Is there a time limit for how long you can use things?
    - What software does the school currently use or have access to? Is there anything you are expected to use?
    - What websites are restricted or blocked from school computers?
    - Who do you go to if you are having a technology-related problem?

- **Being Absent**

    - Who do you call if you're going to be out sick? (Also: Ask a teacher you trust about how your administrators feel about "planned" sick days…also known as "mental health" days. In some schools, you can be up-front about these. In others, you need to just pretend to be sick.)

    - What is the procedure for getting a sub?

    - Is a doctor's note required for absences?

    - How much leave time do you have?

FACULTY & STAFF

- Borrow a copy of last year's yearbook. This will be an indispensable tool for quickly learning the names of the other adults in the building. Obviously there has been some turnover, but the yearbook will contain the names and pictures of most current faculty and staff. It will also help you learn students' names if they attended your school last year.

- Write down the names and contact information for the following people:

  - The main office staff:

  - The custodian(s):

  - The guidance staff:

  - The library/media center staff:

  - The technology coordinator(s):

SECTION 5

CLASSROOM

- Arrange student desks. See [this article](#) for a discussion of different possibilities.

- Create temporary seating charts, with plans to adjust later, after you get to know students. Seating students alphabetically (by last name) will help you learn names more quickly.

- Decide where students will turn in papers.

- Designate a spot in the room where you will write out the day's agenda and any homework that will be due the next day. Keep this place consistent, so students get used to looking there for that information.

- Set up a system for helping students who have been absent get their make-up work. Ask another teacher to see what they do or try this [absent binder](#) idea.

- Put a sign on the outside of your classroom door with your name, grade, subject area (if applicable), and daily schedule.

- Learn how your classroom technology works: How to turn on and perform basic functions with the classroom projector, document cameras, white board, and student computers (if any).

- Make sure you have these supplies on hand in your classroom right away: tissues, antibacterial wipes, hand sanitizer, band-aids, extra pencils, a pencil sharpener (even a hand-held one is fine).

- Create a substitute folder and a set of emergency sub plans. When you have planned absences, you'll be able to prepare plans that are a better fit for what you're teaching at that time, but you also need a backup for unplanned absences. To get an idea of what these look like, ask your colleagues to show you what they use. This article can also help you pull together what you need.

- **Bulletin Boards / Wall Decorations**
  If you have received no guidance for these and don't know what to do, consider these suggestions:

  - One board—or one designated space in your classroom—should contain a place for daily schedules, emergency information, school announcements and flyers—just general, non-academic information.

  - Have one designated place for posting classroom rules, consequences, and general procedures. Not sure what these are yet? Read this.

  - Create at least one board that you could keep up all year, or at least for a very long time. Check out this article for 25 bulletin board ideas from Corkboard Connections.

  - One board could be left blank, so your students can take turns decorating it. This could be based around a particular unit of study, if you like, or students could propose their own ideas. This is a great way to give students more ownership of the classroom.

- **Emergency Procedures**
  Find out exactly what you and your class need to do and where you need to go during the following situations, and keep this information in a place where you can easily access it:

  - Fire drills

  - Lock-downs or other safety procedures

  - Earthquake, tornado, or other weather-related drills or events

SECTION 6

STUDENTS

- Have students complete an index card (or use a Google Form) on your first day with the following information (Yes, you can get this information from the office or from school databases, but it's nice to have a set of cards for your own quick access.):

  - First and last name

  - Parent names and contact information (phone numbers and emails)

  - Student contact information (phone numbers and emails, for older students)

  - Address

  - Birthday

  - Class schedule (if applicable)

- Start building a relationship with your students by distributing a "getting to know you" questionnaire. If you don't have one, try these Student Inventories.

- Create a folder of blank class lists: Student names in the first column, followed by about 10 columns with nothing in them. These can be used to record anything from turned-in permission slips to fire drill attendance. You'll need them, so get them ready. And be sure to add a few empty rows at the bottom, so you can add names of new students if needed.

- Find out which students in your class have IEPs, 504 plans, gifted services plans, or any other academic, medical, or other legally binding documents you'll need to adhere to.

  - If no one addresses these with you, ask your guidance counselor, department or PLC head, or administrator.

  - If your previous training hasn't taught you exactly what you're required to do for any of these students, find out which people in the building are responsible for making sure you meet these students' needs, and ask them exactly what you're required to do.

- Find out where you can access students' academic records, and what you're allowed to see. As you get to know students and work toward personalizing instruction for them, it will be helpful to be able to see past test scores, grades, and other academic information.

- Keep a list of student allergies and other medical information in an easy-to-access place. This information will come in handy before class parties or other snack-related events, field trips, and other situations where health information is needed.

SECTION 7

CURRICULUM

- Get a copy of the state standards for every grade and subject you are responsible for. Put these in the Standards/Curriculum section of your notebook. If they are too bulky, store them in your filing system instead.

- Create electronic bookmarks so you can also access this information online.

- Meet with other teachers on your grade level or in your subject area for help in developing a curriculum map or plan for covering the curriculum over the year. Your school should require this already, but just in case they don't, set up this meeting yourself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING
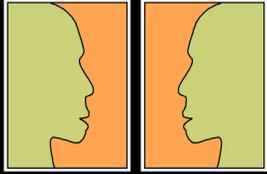
A 3-WEEK UNIT FOR GRADES 7-12

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6 FULLY EDITABLE DESIGNS

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