

25 TERRIFIC TIPS FOR NEW TEACHERS

Pros offer their ideas for getting started on the right foot

What's the single best piece of advice you would offer a brand-new teacher? Pose that question at random to 25 teachers and you're apt to get 25 different answers or, as we like to call them, 25 terrific tips for new teachers.

We picked the brains of classroom veterans across the state, including some master teachers at NYSUT's professional development arm, the Education & Learning Trust.

We also talked to veteran teachers like Jan

Gubiotti and Beth Sugg. These two retirees from the Fairport Teachers Association in western New York have collected so many suggestions over the years they put them together in a book titled *Terrific Tips for Teachers*, one of the publications they offer through LEARN, their Literacy Education and Resource Network.

Although we have numbered these tips for the sake of convenience, we present them in no particular order of importance. Each one, we believe, is a keeper.

1 Whether it's artistic ability, collecting materials or speaking in front of the class, emphasize the special talents each student — including special-needs students — can contribute to the group.



2 Call parents early in the school year to introduce yourself, and say something positive about their child.

3 Greet students daily at the classroom doorway and have something positive to say to each one.

4 Remember you are a role model. Dress professionally.

5 "Show and tell" works at any grade level. Create opportunities for students to share their interests and passions with the class.

6 Until you've established a routine and know everyone's name, keep desks in traditional rows and consider seating students alphabetically.



7 Look for ways to give each student some positive attention.



8 Create a seating chart — in pencil. You will be changing it.

9 Establish a zero tolerance for rudeness.



10 Most parents appreciate suggestions on how to

help their children. Don't be afraid to give them ideas.

11 Buy a big bottle of hand sanitizer and encourage students to use it.

12 Whether in the car or the supermarket, watch your demeanor outside the classroom. It will be noticed and discussed.

13 A colorfully decorated classroom shows students you care about their environment.



14 Choose wall art that serves a purpose and change it regularly. Strategically placed posters can help students learn.

15 Hang a calendar in clear view and post project due dates, upcoming tests, holidays and field trips.



16 Don't use homework as punishment for bad behavior.



17 Decide what your homework policy will be and how you will enforce it — and be consistent.

What do you think?

■ What is your best tip for a new teacher? E-mail us at nyteach@nysutmail.org or write to *New York Teacher*, 800 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham, NY 12110.

18 Don't give extra credit to bail out a student; it should be limited to additional projects, and only after required work is completed.



19 Use student helpers to collect class work and distribute materials so you can keep your eyes focused on the class at all times.

20 Keep brief, anecdotal notes about students; they will come in handy at parent conferences and report card time.

21 Sometimes the students themselves can help you manage the class. Determine early who the class leaders are as well as the ringleaders and form a bond with those students.



22 Avoid talking in a loud voice at the beginning of the day — you'll tire quickly.

23 Have a folder ready for substitutes that includes your schedule, seating charts, names of students with special needs and similar information.



24 Make your expectations of students clear from the start. You might say, for instance: "I will treat each of you with respect, and I expect you to treat me and each other with respect."

25 Don't allow students to complain about other teachers in your classroom.

— John Strachan

Become involved

After more than 24 years as an elementary and middle-level teacher, NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue now oversees new-member issues for the statewide union. She encourages newcomers to get involved in the community.

"Participate in local organizations — the Rotary or Lions club — join the Strides walk or volunteer at a food bank," Donahue said. "You'll be supporting the union's social justice agenda while meeting new people and creating a positive image within your community."

For more information ...

- NYSUT Education & Learning Trust: www.nysut.org/elt
- "Works4me" is an ever-changing feature on the National Education Association Web site that lets teachers share their best tips: www.nea.org/tips/index.html
- NYSUT booklets and pamphlets that can help new teachers: www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xml/newyorkteacher_11017.htm
- LEARN, the Literacy Education and Resource Network: www.learnwebsite.com

Members offer more tips for new teachers

'Teacher' article about good ideas generates even more good ideas

Editor's note: The Nov. 20 report, "25 terrific tips for new teachers," by New York Teacher staffer John Strachan generated many letters and e-mails from other teachers — active and retired — who wanted to share their own experiences. Here is a sampling:

Every new teacher should read *The First Day of School* by Harry Wong. I credit that text for my success the four years I spent teaching in a junior high school. What he taught me about classroom management is invaluable.

L. Kamila Smith
Guidance counselor
Union Square Business Academy
Washington Irving High School
New York City

I was impressed with all the terrific tips for new teachers in the Nov. 20 issue of the *New York Teacher*. I would like to add one to the list. This one was given to my accelerated class of 1945 by our history teacher at SUNY Potsdam. Our teacher was concerned because we were accelerated, and he gave us this advice: "Be firm but fair." I taught for 32 years with this in mind. It worked.

Lena Spadafore
Retiree Council 9

Here are three more tips:

1. New or young teachers should never sit behind their desks while teaching a lesson. Move around the room. Keep students engaged at all times. If your feet hurt at the end of the day, find comfortable shoes that will keep you moving with less pain. "A teacher's behind that sits becomes wider and wider. That makes you slower and slower."

2. Work on your room constantly. Display student updated work; keep the room clean. Always make it a part of your daily routine. Bulletin boards should also be kept up to date with the latest curriculum. Your students will never tell you, but they love a clean, organized room.

3. Every new teacher should contribute to some kind of tax-deferred annuity savings program as soon as possible. This is a very good way to save for the future and concentrate on the job now. We are teachers, not business people. The tax-deferred annuity will help secure the later years.

Ralph Verdiglione
Retired teacher of special education

The best thing I always said to my class was that I was privileged and proud to be chosen to be their teacher. I reviewed their



my ideas and those that other teachers have submitted as well: www.energizetheclassroom.com. I am currently a social studies teacher at Thomas Edison High School in Elmira Heights, and have been teaching for 12 years. I also just published a book titled, *Energize the High School Classroom; Keep it Fun! Keep it Relevant! Keep Learning!*

Again, thanks for the interesting article and tips.
Paul Richmond
Received via e-mail

What to say to those students who, when called upon, offer up the well-worn excuse, "I don't know."

Respond by asking "If you did know, what would you say?" Then keep a running tab of how many times this small retort invites a student to make a contribution to the class. I was surprised to find it worked more than 90 percent of the time. This technique applied with a little bit of humor was very helpful for me.

Michael Goodman
Retired social studies teacher
Victor Central School, Victor

records just like their doctors did and I determined they were all capable of having a successful school year. As their teacher, I was one of many professionals in that school who were responsible for them. We were not going to let them fail, nor allow them to negotiate down the standards we had.

New teachers need to believe from the start that they are professionals, and professionalism has many responsibilities such as a commitment to quality work, not blaming others or the system, and thinking long term.

Also, always think question-answer-question, not question-answer. Teacher questions based on curriculum should be to create, encourage and engage thinking. If all your questions just require one answer and do not stimulate further thinking and exploration, do us all a favor and leave your keys in the office. We want students who think.

Michele Mazur
New-teacher induction facilitator
Syracuse City Schools

I enjoyed the article "25 terrific tips for new teachers." Sharing tips and ideas is so valuable, especially to new teachers.

I have a tip of my own: Do not be afraid to be the basis of a classroom joke. It adds to class environment/atmosphere.

I also have a Web site that shares more of

Well, not everyone agreed:

I am a retired New York City teacher with more than 32 years of experience. Presently, I'm teaching part time in college. After reading your article "25 terrific tips for new teachers" I must respectfully disagree with most of the tips. They reflect inexperience and highly unrealistic expectations that typically is displayed by the State Education Department. Clearly, teachers and students are not machines with unlimited time on their hands. There's absolutely no doubt that the author of the article is living on another planet. Isn't it time to come back to earth?

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