

When the Going Gets Tough

So! You've made it through your summer classes, you have spent hours, days, a lifetime preparing procedures, protocols and getting-to-know-you-activities. You are now ready to glide off into a blissful career as an expert teacher. Not so fast! The first week of teaching is a roller-coaster ride full of amazing ups and occasionally devastating downs. In fact, all of teaching in your first year can be a pretty tricky proposition. As any first year teacher will testify, teaching is a stressful occupation. From exhaustion, to lack of personal time, to coping with challenging teacher-student interactions, teachers often feel the repercussions of their demanding jobs in their personal lives. As teachers we want to be there for our students. We want to put in the hours, the effort, and the emotionally commitment, but we also need to acknowledge that this is not a job that we can leave in the office and that it can be extremely taxing. We are better teachers when we also take care of ourselves. When the going gets tough the alt-certs get going!



In this sections, Casey Held outlines some of the trials and tribulations faced by new teachers as well as constructive and pre-emptive methods of dealing, decompressing, and pressing on. It ain't easy but the rewards are immeasurable and as Casey will remind you, we've all been there.

Personal Issues



TEACHING IS A STRESSFUL JOB.

This workshop will focus on three things:

1. What kinds of things might produce stress
2. The different ways that stress can manifest itself in your life
3. What you can do about it (there is hope!)

OPENING ACTIVITY: For each occurrence below, assign values from 1-10 first for how often you think this happens in a typical classroom (1 being almost never, 10 being all the time), and second for how strongly you think you would react to it (1 being “this wouldn’t affect me” and 10 being “I would think seriously about jumping out my classroom window and making a run for it.”)

		A student curses at you in class.
		You find a note from one student to another that talks about what a terrible teacher you are.
		A student gets angry and starts throwing things around the room.
		A student threatens real harm to another student.
		A student pushes you in the hallway.
		A fight breaks out among two students while

		you're responsible for them.
		A particularly scary administrator comes in unannounced to observe your class.
		You send a child to the office for a severe disruption, and the child is sent back with no punishment.
		You are reprimanded by an administrator.
		A parent calls the school to complain about you because her child told her a lie about something that happened in class.

The truth is, **you don't know how you will react to a situation, or how it will affect you, until it's happening.** You can mentally prepare for kids throwing things at you, verbal abuse (sometimes from adults!), or any other awful situation, but often, when you're in the middle of it, you simply **react**. Sometimes, your gut reactions are completely different from what you thought they would be.

The chart above shows a few of the things that can, and probably will, happen to a first year teacher. The fact of the matter is that JCPS needs teachers in high-stress jobs. Why? Because the more experienced teachers often choose to teach in less challenging situations. Sad, but true.

During the course of your first year of teaching, in addition to all the good feelings you will have, you will probably feel **lonely, angry, hurt, frustrated, tired, and ready to quit.** You are not the only one to experience those feelings!

POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF LIFE AS A FIRST-YEAR TEACHER

These are all things that happened to me at some point last year. There were some other circumstances that contributed, but teaching was the main cause of most of these:

1. **Losing Sleep** – I literally did not sleep through the night from August until May. Melatonin can help. Even if you have no physical problems getting to sleep, you may find that lesson planning and grading will

keep you up very late at first. Fatigue in the classroom can heighten emotions and make you a not-very-fun teacher.

2. **Headaches** – Please, for your own sake, invest in a super-large bottle of Advil. Keep it at school.
3. **Overreacting to the Small Things** – If you've been asked the same question five times in ten minutes, it's very easy to snap at the sixth person who asks you. It's not fair to that sixth kid if you lose it simply because you're tired of answering the same question. How was he to know?
4. **Crying. And crying. And crying.** I even cried (once) in front of my students. My team leader had just gotten kicked in the stomach by a student (very on purpose). The entire class of kids sided with him, and told the police officer it was an accident. It was usually just accumulated stress that made me come home and spend a solid hour crying, though, rather than a single incident. When you're tired and stressed and have a test to grade, a week's worth of lesson plans to get ready to turn in, and U of L work, it's easy to start crying.
5. **Health Problems** – As a first year teacher, you will get sick, probably more often than you did in college. Middle schoolers (kids of all ages, really) are walking, talking cesspools of germs.
6. **Homesickness** – Even if you lived away from home while you were at

college, the stress of being “on your own” with a new (pressure-filled) job can make you very homesick.

CHEER UP! THINGS YOU CAN DO TO COMBAT THE STRESS

1. **Talk to someone** – This piece of advice is first because I think it really is the most important thing you can do if you’re experiencing a rough patch. Talk to one of the second-year people – we’ve just finished living through it, after all. Talk to Rowan. Talk to your parents. Talk to someone you trust at school. Talk to siblings. Talk to significant others. You get the point.
2. **PUT THE WORK DOWN, AND NO ONE GETS HURT** – Everyone wants to be a fantastic first-year teacher. But that doesn’t mean that you need to put 20 hours a day into your job. You cannot be a good teacher to your students, or give them 100%, if you are a zombie. Go to sleep. Go out with your friends. Go see a movie. Find something you love to do, and **MAKE TIME** to do it.
3. **Eat healthily, and exercise whenever you get a chance.** This is another pitfall of many first-year teachers. “I don’t have time to cook something healthy, so I’ll reheat this pizza.” “An hour to exercise? Ha! I’ve got 100 tests to grade!” However, eating well and exercising will not only improve your health, they will also relieve lots of stress, relax your muscles, and make you happy.
4. **Try to have the memory of a 12 year old.** You can have a monstrous, knock-down drag-out fight with one of your students one day, and come back the next day to find that you’re his favorite teacher. Kids don’t hold grudges. If you do, you will not only treat your students unfairly, but you will also carry around a lot of pointless baggage.

In this section, Lisa Smith offers a comprehensive guide to surviving your first week of school. From checklists, to supply suggestions, to a day by day overview, Lisa offers practical and knowledgeable advice with an enjoyable dose of pithy humor. You may still need to hold onto your hat but Lisa's advice will help you have a much smoother ride.

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Surviving Your First Week! General questions to ask:

<i>Where is:</i>	<i>Who is:</i>	<i>How do I:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The main office</i> • <i>The principal's office</i> • <i>The assistant principal's office</i> • <i>The library</i> • <i>The parking lot</i> • <i>The cafeteria</i> • <i>The computer labs</i> • <i>The teacher's lounge</i> • <i>The mailboxes</i> • <i>A map of the building</i> • <i>The bathrooms</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Secretaries</i> • <i>Counselors</i> • <i>Department Head</i> • <i>Nearby teachers</i> • <i>Team Leader</i> • <i>The media specialist or librarian</i> • <i>Master teachers in your subject</i> • <i>The person in charge of classroom purchases</i> • <i>Coaches</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fill out a referral</i> • <i>How to fill out an accident report form</i> • <i>How to fill out a counselor referral</i> • <i>Record Attendance, Tardies, Grades</i> • <i>Fill out a grade book</i> • <i>Fill out lesson plans</i> • <i>Find classroom materials</i> • <i>Order classroom supplies</i> • <i>Get repairs done in your room</i> • <i>Get involved in clubs and sports</i> • <i>Find the technology and audio/visual equipment</i> • <i>Find out bus numbers of students</i> • <i>Call in sick</i> • <i>Arrange supervision when your called out of class</i>

Meeting with Administrators and Your Team:

The more you know the ins and outs of your school the more confident you will feel on your first day teaching. If you are on an interdisciplinary team you should try to meet with them as soon as possible. If you are not you will want to meet with administrators in your building, such as your assistant principle. Things you should ask:

- 1.) How do you want teachers to handle discipline problems?
- 2.) How do you communicate with me what consequences or actions were taken when I send a student to you? (By contract, you are allowed to and should know what has become of each of your students infractions.)
- 3.) How would you like me to take care of attendance, grade books and lesson planning? When are these things due?
- 4.) What resources do you want me to use? Textbooks? Technology? What resources are available?
- 5.) What are the rules for holding class outside or in the library?
- 6.) What are the evacuation procedures?
- 7.) How would you like me to deal with parent conferences? What should I do about an angry parent?
- 8.) What are the policies about driving students in my car for special events?
- 9.) Where do I get information about kids with learning or behavioral disabilities? How do I know who they are and what should I do with any documents given to me?
- 10.) What should I do if a kid is being bullied, if I suspect abuse, or otherwise am concerned about the safety or well being of a child? When should I send kids to the counselor?

Welcome to Your Own Classroom:

Hold on a minute! My classroom doesn't have a window? My classroom has 32 desks squished into a small walk in closet? Did a natural disaster recently hit my classroom? There aren't any supplies and materials? Where are my textbooks?

Be prepared for a messy and perhaps inhospitable classroom; there's not much you can do, you're a first year teacher with no seniority and you've probably been hired late in the game. As the old adage says, "If you want something done, do it yourself." This goes for cleaning and preparing your classroom.

Preparing for the Storm:

Sorry to say there's just a whole lot of "stuff" you have to complete and find before day one. Just keep in mind everyone is bogged down with a million forms and things to do in preparation for the school year. You aren't the only one suffering and you will survive! Here are some things you want to complete or find before the first day of school:

- 1.) *TC1 Form*: You want to make sure your TC1 form is complete and signed by JCPS and U of L. This needs to be sent in to the KY Department of Education in Frankfurt for you to get provisional certification and your teacher's salary.
- 2.) *Health Insurance and Life Insurance Policies*: Try to fill in all of your health and life insurance forms before the start of the year. It's just busy work, but once school starts you are going to be B.U.S.Y..
- 3.) *Grade Books and Lesson Plan Books*: Your school may give you a grade book and a lesson plan book. You may have certain requirements to fulfill regarding both of these depending on the school. There are many excellent computerized grade books and your school may use one of these; ask around—there are people in your building that would be glad to show you.
- 4.) *Syllabus*: It is a good idea to create a syllabus outlining your academic and behavioral expectations of your students, some of the things they will be learning, how you plan to break down grades, and the supplies they'll need. Keep it short and simple; not like a college one. It's a good idea to put somewhere on it that it is subject to change upon your discretion. You may have an open house and parents will be looking for these.
- 5.) *Behavior Contract*: Many teachers create behavior contracts that outline the rules and procedures of their classroom. You might require your students and their parents to sign these contracts the first week of school. Keep in mind that your school and your team might have specific procedures, rules and consequences already established. Make sure you know these well; you do not want to hesitate and you must be consistent to gain authority in your class- room. Be careful about the consequences you set; they must be reasonable for both you and the kids.
- 6.) *Evacuation Procedures & Maps*: You should receive specific directions for fire drills, tornados and other emergency evacuations. Most schools require that you post a map and these directions in your classroom. Make sure you understand all of these directions.
- 7.) *Schedules*: It is a good idea to post class schedules, bathroom break times (if you have team breaks) and any other schedule (sports schedule, school calendar, daily agenda calendar) that demonstrates structure and order in your classroom.
- 8.) *Posters*: Don't overdo posters, kids also like to see their own work up. But it is a good idea to put up a few things that highlight what you feel is important in your content. Kids need structure and safe and supportive environment.

Supplies for Your Classroom:

Some rooms will be overflowing with supplies and left-over trinkets from teacher's past and some will come with only an empty teachers desk. Your team might have money to buy supplies, but teachers end up spending a lot of their own money as well. Save all your receipts and ask your team, the administration, or your department chairs about possible funds. Keep in mind that if you start the year off supplying students with materials they'll expect it the entire year and you'll burn a big whole in your pocket. Even your kids on free and reduced lunch can get basics and if they cannot, that is the school's responsibility. Guard your supplies well. Here are some things you might want in your room:

- 1.) paper clips (of many sizes)
- 2.) stapes and stapler (you'll need a heavy duty one)
- 3.) scotch tape
- 4.) white out
- 5.) #2 pencils (I'd recommend not providing kids with pencils except for big tests, if you do, purchase the bulk golf pencils.)
- 6.) Push pins (don't get the oversized ones, kids chuck them)
- 7.) File folders
- 8.) Index Cards and sticky notes
- 9.) Erasers
- 10.) Three hole punch (you'll need a heavy duty one)
- 11.) A heavy duty pencil sharpener
- 12.) Heavy duty tape to hang posters
- 13.) Dry Erase markers or chalk and an eraser
- 14.) Crayons (careful kids break these into pieces and chuck them)
- 15.) Markers and Colored Pencils
- 16.) Paper—lined or blank (might be provided at your school)
- 17.) Scissors, Rulers & Glue (can often borrow these from other teachers)
- 18.) Construction Paper, Butcher Paper (sometimes provided at school)
- 19.) Enough desks and chair (31)
- 20.) An overhead projector and screen
- 21.) A TV if other teachers have them
- 22.) A personal computer if other teacher's have them
- 23.) A printer (if it is provided)
- 24.) A cabinet or storage system for files (it is great if one of these is lockable)
- 25.) Three rings folders for yourself

The FIRST day:

In other words, oh shit, they're here! The night before, take deep breaths, do a good luck dance, take up yoga, and PRAY. Just remember you're older and you're wiser. If you think you are nervous; your kids are tenfold. Remember this moment, when your kids come in, eyes darting around the room, staring at each other unconsciously, strutting with insecurity, camouflaging with your doorway, too shy to say their name loud enough for you to hear them. This is a moment you'll want to remember in your darkest hours; that these are, after all, JUST KIDS—horny, confused and seeking acceptance. And you are the ADULT--their role model for half the waking day. They need you to maintain order; they want you to be firm and mean what you say. They want to trust you and they want your respect, but you have to earn it by creating a safe environment.

Establishing Yourself on the First Day:

The trick to maintaining order is knowing what your expectations are in the first place. You must have a set of rules and consequences and/or incentives in place. Do not hesitate; do not question yourself in front of the kids. You will want to over-plan everything and have plenty of things for the kids to do if you suddenly develop a lull in your schedule (quizzes, mazes, word games, a book to read to them, simon-says); the last thing you want is 31 kids staring at you with nothing to do, then comes chaos. Keep the kids busy, but make whatever they are doing meaningful to them. You will probably have a whole list of chores you have to do for your administration, but here is the outline for your first days.

- 1.) Arrive to school early, so you know everything is in order.
- 2.) Write your agenda for the day on the board (some teachers even write approximate time allowances for each activity) and a student-friendly objective. (Alternatively you could have this on an overhead). Remember, keep them busy the entire period.
- 3.) Assign seats. Keep in mind 31+ kids may be walking into your classroom all at once, so if you decide to assign seats, which I strongly recommend, devise a system that doesn't block your doorway. Group seating is not advised for the first week of school.

Establishing Yourself (continued)

- 4.) Most teachers have a survey for the first day of classes that asks students to write about their interests.
- 5.) This is the best time to get contact information—tell them it is for emergency use. One strategy you might want to use is having each student write their name on an index card with their address, and as many phone numbers as you can get from them—home phone, parent’s cell phone, parent’s work phone. You can then file these alphabetically and when you need to call a parent pull it out, you can make a note that you called the parent on the opposite side of the index card as a record. Whatever you decide to do, give them a time limit and make your expectations very clear. For example, you might display an overhead with your behavior expectations that says explicitly, “When you have finished wait quietly for directions.”
- 6.) You may have to pick your students up and drop them off from another classroom. Keep in mind that when they enter your classroom you want to have a clear view of your class. Sometimes the best way to maintain hallway order and classroom order in this situation is to line them up outside your door before they can enter your classroom.
- 7.) Introduce yourself. Be positive and assertive. Point out the agenda and your objective. Tell them they will be in the same spot everyday. Give your directions clearly. Welcome students to your class and mention your name.
- 8.) You can call roll and take attendance before or while they fill out your survey. You may also have to do a dress code check depending on your school policies. Some teachers walk around and ask each student their name individually. This is a good idea to build rapport. Remember, even though you are trying to assert your authority in the classroom the first week of classes, you are also trying to establish relationships with your students.

Establishing Yourself (continued)

9.) Collect things as soon as they are finished; this way students don't have paper to wad up and throw at each other in front of them. Getting student volunteers is a good way to build rapport, but remember you are the one in charge.

10.) Some schools will require you to cover certain material pertaining to the procedures of your school during the first day and weeks. It is difficult to maintain order and engagement in your class if you wait to introduce them to the material they'll be learning about. While you don't want to go into a lengthy discussion of the course academic expectations, you do want to hook their interest in your class. If you can, it might be a good idea to incorporate a very engaging mini-lesson pertaining to your course.

11.) Go over your class rules today. You do not need to go into the minute details of all of your academic and behavioral procedures and policies today, but you do want to set the mood for your class. Be very specific in your rules and don't have too many of them (5 is a good number). A lot of teachers draw upon analogies to make them seem more pertinent to the students—rules of basketball, rules of the road. You might say there'll be a quiz on these rules in a few days; make sure they know and understand all of the rules.

12.) Some teachers create a behavior contract that the students sign on the first day that lists the rules and some of the possible consequences. Some teachers even make the students get these signed by parents. The risk with requiring parent signatures is that you may never see those contracts again if the student takes it home—depending on the classes you have. You want your students to earn high grades the first couple weeks of school to set a tone of success in your classroom. This could be a 100% participation grade, just another "A" to call home about on the first week of classes and build rapport with parents.

13.) You do want to have a syllabus of some sort that the students can take home to their parents the first day of class. Many parents will not have shown up to open-house if you have one, and will be wanting to know the supplies you require for their student and the expectations you have set for your class.

Establishing Yourself (cont.)

14.) Closure. Stay positive and assertive the whole class period and keep an eye on the clock. You want to be smooth your first day or at least appear that way. Like with all good lessons you want to make sure that you have achieved your objective for the day—be explicit. If you have assigned homework make sure to remind them of it. If you have assigned students to gather supplies give them time a timeline for gathering them (by the end of the first week of school is a good timeline).

Troubleshooting:

Be prepared to be flexible your first couple of weeks. There is likely to be a lot of schedule changing in your school. Your class roster will most likely be incorrect, if you receive a class roster at all. That's right, sometimes you don't even know who you'll have until minutes before the school bell rings. You also might not have enough seats for all your kids. You might have a sudden meeting before the day begins or during a planning block that messes with your plans for the day. Just keep cool-- stay calm, stay relaxed. Whatever it is, it'll work itself out. When you're standing in front of your kids you need to appear to be the one in control, so you don't want to be ripping your hair out in front of them.

And hey, if you end up with the class from hell and they are yelling on the first day don't yell back. Be assertive, but don't stoop to their level. If you are struggling seek help. Don't be bashful about asking others in your building for their expertise; many will love to help and give you strategies. Seek help quickly and develop relationship with your colleagues as soon as you can; this can be a life saver in days to come.

Finally, remember to go home and relax. You'll feel like you need to do everything and the list will just be so long. Whether it's a good day or a bad day, go home and just forget about them for awhile. Tomorrow is always another day.