

Welcome, Premium Subscriber
MY ACCOUNT | LOGOUT

NEW! FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY
Digital Edition of Education Week

TOPICS ▼ SPECIAL REPORTS ▼ BLOGS EVENTS ▼ OPINION ▼ CAREERS ▼



Complete Coverage ▶

CONNECT WITH COLLEAGUES |

9 Mistakes New Teachers Make



—Image by Earl/Flickr Creative Commons

By Cristie Watson

August 4, 2015

“Ctrl+Z” is one of the greatest functions ever created. The ability to undo mistakes helps me, as I have a knack for accidentally deleting entire pages with a touch of my hand. Sometimes, I also need an undo button in my classroom, to alter a lesson that flopped or “delete” the way I snapped at a student. Certainly I could have used a reset button my first year of teaching, as I struggled to manage my classroom and meet my students’ needs. Now, 15 years later, I can reflect on that experience and recognize some common mistakes of first-time educators. As many of you are prepping and planning for your first classes, consider how you can avoid some of the errors I made.

1. Inconsistency

It’s difficult to manage a classroom without consistency and routine, yet it takes experience to establish what works best. In the meantime, borrow from the others’

- [Printer-Friendly](#)
- [Email Article](#)
- [Reprints](#)
- [Comments](#)

EDUCATION WEEK EVENTS

[How to Scale Ed-Tech Innovations in Your Schools](#)
WEBINAR AUG. 28, 2:00 P.M. EASTERN
[REGISTER NOW.](#)

[Building Teacher Confidence and Camaraderie Through Math Coaching](#)
WEBINAR AUG. 29, 2:00 P.M. EASTERN
[REGISTER NOW.](#)

[Three Actionable Strategies to Overcome Common Dyslexia Screening Challenges](#)
SPONSOR WEBINAR SEPT. 17, 2:00 P.M. EASTERN
[REGISTER NOW.](#)

Content Provided by: [HMH/Amira Learning](#)

[Measuring and Improving Equity and Inclusion in Schools](#)
SPONSOR WEBINAR SEPT. 18, 2:00 P.M. EASTERN
[REGISTER NOW.](#)

Content Provided by: [Panorama Education](#)

[The Power and Purpose of Text Levels](#)
SPONSOR WEBINAR SEPT. 23, 4:00 P.M. EASTERN
[REGISTER NOW.](#)

Content Provided by: [Heinemann](#)

MOST POPULAR STORIES

[Viewed](#) | [Emailed](#) | [Recommended](#) | [Commented](#)

1. [Teaching Secrets: Get to Know Students Through Seating Challenges](#)
2. [The Urgent Need for Anti-Racist Education](#)
3. [4 Things Teachers Shouldn't Be Asking Their Students to Do](#)

expertise. Before school starts, talk with your grade level and content area teammates. What are their classroom expectations and procedures? What routines do they establish the first week of school? How do they start and end their lessons? Once you've determined some strategies for managing your classroom, be sure to practice them early on with your students and use them consistently.

2. Focusing on Lesson Planning Rather than Student Learning

My first year of teaching, I was desperate to keep my students busy. Prepared with work sheets on every topic, I'd lead 10 minutes of grammar instruction, followed by vocabulary work, then a class novel, and so on. This practice may have passed the time, but my lesson plans lacked purpose. Structure your class using essential standards, clearly stating the goal of each lesson, modeling tasks, and allowing time for students to practice. Then they know what they are learning, and you have evidence of their understanding. Avoid worrying about what your students will do in class, and think, "What do my kids need to learn?"

3. Grading Everything

I used to feel guilty when I assigned work, knowing I wasn't going to grade it. I also used to intimidate students with grades when they were off task. As a result, I scrambled to collect and "grade" every assignment, though usually just for completion. Eventually I learned the foolishness of my thinking. Class activities and homework assignments should be opportunities for students to learn and practice new skills. And who would want to be judged on a first attempt when learning something new? Now I grade what my students actually know or can do. For instance, my students and I may spend a few days practicing using context clues. Then I assess their ability to do so independently through a "ticket-out-the-door," short quiz, or conference. I grade fewer papers, yet provide more meaningful scores for students and their parents.

4. Avoiding Parent Contact

As a beginning teacher, I was uncomfortable calling parents. I was closer in age to the teens in my room than the adults on the line, and felt like a tattling child as I stammered out my reason for calling. When you call parents, make sure you are calm and able to speak with a positive tone. Describe the strategies you've tried in class, and ask for suggestions. Parent contact is most beneficial when it's clear you are all on the same side, working in the child's best interest. Consistent parent contact is important, too, whether it be a weekly newsletter, email, or updated website. It builds your credibility and makes further interactions with parents more productive.

5. Not Setting Boundaries With Students

We love our students and know the value of getting to know each one as individuals. However, you need to set some boundaries in the teacher-student relationship, beyond just setting your Instagram account to private. As the cool, young teacher, students may feel more comfortable around you, treating you as a confidante, but it's important to remain professional. When a child drops by to see you, keep your door open. If they discuss personal information, such as feelings of depression or problems at home, contact a guidance counselor. Your interactions with students, in person or via email, should not be secret, and students should understand you have a duty to report sensitive information to the necessary school figures. Troubled kids may want you to be their friend, but they need you to be a responsible adult.

6. Being Afraid to Ask for Help

When struggling as a first-year teacher, it's tempting to hide in your room. However, helpful solutions may be right down the hall. When asking for advice from teammates,

4. Teachers, We Don't Have to Be Martyrs

5. Complaining About Students Is Toxic. Here Are 4 Ways to Stop

SPONSOR INSIGHTS

[Increased Social Connectedness Through Digital Peer Learning](#)

[Digital Ecosystems Support Educational Equity](#)

[Effective Social-Emotional Learning for the Next Generation of Leaders](#)

[The Nonnegotiable Attributes of Effective Feedback](#)

[The EdTech Efficacy Handbook](#)

[Accelerate Student Writing Proficiency and Progress With Simple, Effective Feedback](#)

[Making the Future: Creative Hands-On Learning with a Laser Cutter](#)

[Automated Communication: A Winning Strategy for Low Lunch Balances](#)

[Complete Differentiated Instruction: Continuum for Administrators](#)

[Growth Matters 7 Key Criteria for Measuring Growth](#)

[How to Secure Your School From Critical Cyber Threats](#)

[Using Technology to Keep K-12 Schools Safe](#)

[Response to Intervention Centered on Student Learning](#)

[Effective K-12 Literacy Strategies to Prevent Dropout](#)

[SEE MORE Insights >](#)

[Partner Engagement Manager](#)
AVID Center, Southern California

[University Guidance Counselor. IB School. Dubai.](#)
Galvin Education, Dubai (City) (AE)

[School Bus Driver](#)
Madison Highland Prep, Phoenix, Arizona

[Teacher and Teaching Assistants \(Birth - Grade 2\)](#)
Sky Advertising, Brooklyn, New York

[Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship](#)
Department Of Energy, Washington D.C.

[MORE EDUCATION JOBS >>](#)

mentors, or administrators, be specific and solution-oriented. You may also seek assistance in virtual communities. Participate in educational Twitter chats, or join the [Center for Teaching Quality](#) and post a question. Know that asking for help doesn't mean you're a bad teacher. Rather, it's a sign that you're being proactive and have a willingness to improve.

7. Being Afraid to Speak Up

Beginning teachers have much to offer their school communities, but may be hesitant to speak up among their veteran colleagues. Start your growth as a teacher-leader by actively participating in your professional learning community. Share your ideas and favorite technology tools. Gather assessment data and report what you've discovered. You may soon find other teachers approaching you for help! This past year, new teachers in my building led professional development sessions on setting up online classrooms and using standards-based grading.

8. Burning Out

Teaching requires a lot of time and energy. Learn to set limits for yourself and prioritize your well-being. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your to-do list, schedule some fun! Add a book club meeting, workout, dinner date, or even a few extra hours of sleep to your calendar. Taking care of yourself, physically and mentally, is an accomplishment worth checking off your list.

9. Forgetting the Joys of Teaching

The difficult realities of teaching hit hard in your first few years. Standardized testing, paperwork, and extracurricular duties can be overwhelming. Learning to focus on the positive experiences can help you power through tough days. Remember why you chose education in the first place. What we do matters, and sometimes remembering that simple fact can make all the difference.

Ultimately, educators at every level make mistakes. While there may not be a "Ctrl+Z" function for the classroom, each morning represents a chance to start fresh, make amends, and try again. Children are resilient and incredibly forgiving. Give your students your best, and you will be amazed at what you can accomplish year after year, imperfections and all.

Cristie Watson (@CristieWatson) is a National Board Certified teacher and member of the [CTQ Collaboratory](#). She teaches 6th grade English language arts and social studies at Gravelly Hill Middle School in Efland, N.C.

WEB ONLY

RELATED STORIES

["Study: Teacher Outreach to Parents Has 'Under-Explored Potential' in Schools,"](#) (Teaching Now) May 27, 2015.

["New Studies Find That, for Teachers, Experience Really Does Matter,"](#) March 25, 2015.

RELATED OPINION

["How Teachers Can Recharge This Summer,"](#) June 15, 2015.

["Three Mistakes Teacher Leaders Can Avoid This Year,"](#) August 6, 2013.

["Why Wrong Is Not Always Bad,"](#) May 18, 2011.



Reprint or License This Article

Notice: We recently upgraded our comments. (Learn more [here](#).) If you are logged in as a subscriber or registered user and already have a Display Name on edweek.org, you can post comments. If you do not

already have a Display Name, please create one [here](#).

6 Comments Education Week

Login

Recommend 1

Tweet

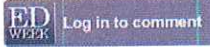
Share

Sort by Oldest



Join the discussion...

LOG IN WITH



OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS ?

Name

Email

Password

Please access our [Privacy Policy](#) to learn what personal data Disqus collects and your choices about how it is used. All users of our service are also subject to our [Terms of Service](#).



NJB • 4 years ago

Nice job, great article - I wish I had read it the August before my first year/ years of teaching.

One of the things that was most frustrating & least helpful was reading or hearing "you jut need to find what works best in your class room" and "everyone is different, you'll find the discipline/ classroom management style that works best for you".

All true...but if you aren't given a few concrete examples/ suggestions, the way that you did, it's hard to 'modify' them into your own style...you can't modify something that doesn't exist!! Thanks for the info, it helps even the vets!!

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Ebasco • 4 years ago

Outstanding job!!

Can I add a few embellishments? OK, I will in random order.

#4. This is hard! Calling an upset parent from a different culture can land you in hot water. If you have one or two problem students, go to the teacher they had the year before or if you teach science ask the math teacher. See if you can conference with the other teacher if they are having problems, and find out why not if you are.

#8. Make sure you only work one weekend a month. Go home and leave it all at school on Friday night. Your life is YOUR life, not theirs. Go to a sports event the other Friday nights and see your students and their parents in THEIR world. Cheer your team, then go home and sleep til noon!

#3. Collect a piece of paper from every student every day, even if it's nothing but their notes. Stamp it with an airplane or a flower, not a WOW or GOOD JOB, and give ten points if it's honest. Just see that it got handed in. Make sure you get a TA for last period, and have them do it. Get an alphabetical sorter from the an office supply company, have students hand their papers in alphabetical last name order, then you know who forgot to put their name on their paper and you don't have to go up and down the grade book doing entries making dozens of mistakes. Begin to reward being in class on task, give a zero to the few who turn in a fake: zero or ten. This cost of \$24 will save you dozens of hours of work and