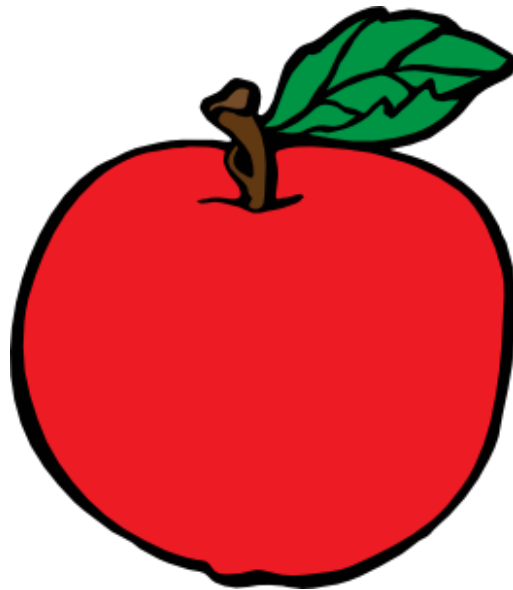


300+

Teacher Tips

19 pages of quick tips for new and experienced teachers. Alphabetically arranged by topic for easy reference

- ✓ Holidays
- ✓ Homework
- ✓ Volunteers
- ✓ Organization
- ✓ Management
- ✓ Getting Along
- ✓ Morning Routine
- ✓ Sponge Activities
- ✓ And Much More!



by
Rachel
Lynette



[More Resources by Rachel](#)

Teacher Tips

Here is a collection of over 300 teacher tips – some basic for new teachers and some you may not have thought of before. It is not exhaustive as I have tried to be somewhat selective about what to include. Tips tend to be general as opposed to specific (e.g.: a specific bulletin board idea, directions for making a job chart with an underwater theme). If you want specific instructions for those kinds of things, they are all over the web.

I have included links to relevant posts on my Creative and Critical Thinking Strategies blog, [Minds in Bloom](#) where I have written in more detail about several of these tips. I have also included links to relevant TpT products and freebies, all of which you can find in my [TpT store](#).

Favorite or especially original tips are in **bold**.

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Attention Signals

- Use a bell or chime, shaker etc.
- Turn off the lights
- Clap a pattern – students clap it back
- Say half a word, students say other half, e.g.: *Teacher: Atten... Students: Tion!*
- Count down
- **Count down, at one, students answer with a vocabulary word. Change the word often to keep kids on their toes.**
- *Teacher: One...two Students: Eyes on you!*
- With 5 fingers displayed: “Give me 5” Five fingers stand for:
 - Stop talking
 - Back against the chair
 - Feet on the floor
 - Hands in lap/on desk
 - Eyes on the teacher
- **Give a series of fun commands until the whole class is participating: e.g.: clap your hands 3 times, turn around once. Hop on one foot 2 times, touch your knees etc.**
- Acknowledge students who are listening until everyone is ready – “Ben is ready. I see Karly has put away her book and is ready to for lunch. Thank you Jordan. Lucy is ready too...”
- When students are really zooney or something dangerous is about to happen – just say “Freeze” in a loud voice. They will.
- Find more [teacher suggested Attention Signals here](#)

Bathroom

- Make your bathroom passes really big.
- Put your bathroom passes on a string for a necklace and require kids to wear them – otherwise they might get set down on the floor – ick!
- **Have kids use crossed fingers to indicate that they need to use the bathroom – make eye contact and nod. This way the child does not have to interrupt.**
- Have two large stuffed animals (one for each gender). When a child goes to the bathroom, he/she puts the stuffed animal on his/her desk. Good for when you don’t require students to ask permission.
- **Put spelling words, vocabulary words, brain teasers, current events etc. on bathroom passes. Make every minute count!**
- The back of the bathroom door is another great place for [brain teasers](#) or current events.

Classroom Library

- Organize books by reading level, series, or subject.
- Use bins to organize books

- Make shelves for picture books from gutters nailed to the wall.
- Use a check out sheet
- **A 3 ring binder of short student book reviews filed by title lets kids recommend books to each other. [Here is a free one](#)**
- Class books (books where each child has completed a page) are a great addition
- **Each week, put a piece of paper on the wall with the title of a book that you know many of your students have read. Students can use the paper to comment on the book graffiti-style. Also good for class read-alouds**
- Call your class library something inviting e.g.: Book Nook, Cozy Corner etc.
- Couches, pillows, beanbags, soft rugs are all good additions. Make the space cozy and inviting.
- Make sure one of your classroom jobs is “Librarian” This person’s job is to neaten up the library at the end of the day.
- **Keep a supply of book marks (tag board strips) in the library to be used as needed.**
- Decorate with colorful book covers or library posters
- You can find a great [Minds in Bloom classroom library post here](#).

Bulletin Boards and class decor

- Pay another teacher to do them (not really)
- Here are links to a bunch of bulletins board ideas:
 - <http://www.schoolbulletinboards.net/schoolbulletinboards.net/Home.html>
 - <http://www.teachnet.com/how-to/decor/bboards/>
 - <http://www.bulletinboardpro.com/february.html>
 - <http://jc-schools.net/back2school/bulletin.htm>
 - http://www.teachertools.org/bulletinboards_dynam.asp
- Decorate your door and around your door. [Here is a Minds in Bloom Post](#)
- If your classroom doesn’t have a window – make one from a bulletin board. Change the scene with the seasons.
- Use fabric or wrapping paper for bulletin boards.
- Use Publisher or word to make [posters](#) and banners with motivational quotes.
- Some posters or bulletin boards to consider keeping up all year:
 - class rules/expectations
 - editing notations
 - Writing steps
 - Types of writing
 - Lists of synonyms for boring words (big, happy, said etc.)
 - Common math rules
 - 6 Trait writing
 - Punctuation chart
 - Problem solving chart/how to be a good friend
 - Proper way to head paper
 - Parts of speech chart
 - No excuse spelling words

- Job chart
- Birthday chart/lost teeth
- **Use a fishnet along a wall and clothes pins to display student work (great for letting wet paint dry, too!)**
- Put empty frames up (the fancier the better). Honor exceptional work by displaying them inside the frames
- **Put up a large piece of dark blue construction paper up for each child in your class. Secure work to the paper with large paperclips. Much easier than staples or tacks and the paper makes a nice frame.**
- Hang clothespins or paperclips from strings from the ceiling for displaying work.
- Here is a [Minds in Bloom post on what to do with walls](#)

Classroom jobs

- Take advantage of the free labor that a classroom full of kids can provide! Students can do a lot of the daily upkeep work of keeping your room neat and clean. Here are some jobs to consider:
 - Attendance – takes attendance, possibly does lunch count too
 - Messenger – takes notes to the office and other teachers
 - Paper passer – good to have 2 of these
 - Lunch monitor – makes sure everyone has cleaned their space
 - Computer technician – makes sure computer area is neat – turns computers on before school, off after.
 - Zoo keeper – takes care of class pets
 - Gardener – takes care of class plants
 - Librarian – keeps class library neat
 - White board eraser – erases and cleans white board
 - Floor monitor – makes sure students keep floor clean
 - Lights – turns them on and off as needed
 - Door holder – holds doors for entire class
 - Calendar – does whatever it is you do for calendar
 - Supplies manager – keeps extra supplies like paper, pencils, and crayons neat.
 - Math monitor – keeps math manipulative neat
 - Sink cleaner – keeps sink and counter clean
 - Teacher’s assistant – does whatever little jobs you need doing.
 - Substitute helper – does the job of someone who is absent
- It is nice when everyone has a job. Some jobs can have two students
- Some systems for rotating jobs:
 - Pocket chart – Jobs on pockets, names on cards
 - List of jobs on a long poster – rotate clothespins with students’ names on them (clothes pins can go along the edge)
 - Jobs on a magnetic surface – student names on magnets
 - Rotating pie chart –jobs on center circle, names on outside circle
 - Velcro

- Consider randomly assigning jobs. Each week draw names (popsicle sticks). This might work well toward the end of the year once everyone has had a chance to do each job. Adds a little mystery and fun to the process.
- If you have token economy in your classroom, consider paying a salary for each job.

Classroom Management Systems

- Marble Jars (marbles are accumulated for good behavior, reward when jar is full)
 - The very act of putting in marbles is a reward in itself.
 - Put in marbles for quiet work periods, respectful behavior toward a guest, reinforcing positive behaviors etc.
 - Take marbles out very rarely if ever and if you do, make a very big deal out of it. Marbles only come out if something very bad has occurred.
 - Rewards for a full jar can include a party, extra recess, special treat, a video etc.
- Good behavior currency/token economy (collected for good behavior, can be used at a class sale or auction)
 - Good for rewarding individual behaviors
 - Can be fun to let students submit designs for class currency at the start of the year and then vote to select.
 - One idea for spending is to have students make things to sell to each other on “Market Day” Some ideas include candles, jewelry, baked goods, tops, paper airplanes, etc.
 - Kids can bring stuff for the sale – small toys and books they no longer want etc.
- Group point systems (students are divided into groups according to where they are sitting, groups compete for a running tally of points)
 - Change groups often – weekly or monthly
 - Let groups name themselves
 - Use a running tally on the board.
 - Allow whatever group is in the lead at any given time to go first to recess, get drinks etc.
 - Bigger reward at the end of the week – extra free time or recess.
- Turning cards (students turn colored cards over or move cards when asked for breaking rules)
 - Can have different consequences for different levels of moving cards.
 - Having the student turn the card is a good reinforcer.
 - System starts new each day, so a clean start.
- Starting with Reward (in this system, the students start with the reward, whatever it is and it can taken away in increments for bad behavior)
 - Put a small piece of paper with 15 smiley faces or stars on each student’s desk. Each smiley is a minute of free time. Cross off one at a time, or have the student cross them off as needed. When free time on Friday starts,

students work until it is time for them to have their allotted free time according to how many smiley faces they have left.

- Can also do this as the whole class with smileys on the board or write a word like BRAVO or AWESOME on the board and erase letters for bad behavior. Reward depends on how much of the word is left.
- Raffles (kids get tickets for good behavior, tickets are drawn for rewards)
 - Lady luck is fickle. Somehow that kid that only had one ticket in the jar always seems to win the best reward while the kid who many tickets gets shafted. To help with this, raffle off a lot of small prizes frequently as opposed to just a few high-stakes rewards.
 - Don't use raffles with kids under third grade. The unfairness of it all is too much for some of them.
 - Consider not using them at all.

Communications with Parents

- Weekly Newsletters
 - Design a template to use each week
 - Make it easy to spot **Dates to Remember** by bolding them or putting them in the margins
 - **Let a different kid decorate the margins each week**
 - Make the newsletter the same color every week so it is quickly recognizable
 - Include your contact information – email too, on each newsletter
- Weekly Report Cards
 - Include a list of unfinished work
 - Use a color system so that kids are trying for a “gold slip” each week
 - Require parent signatures
 - Make as simple as possible. 3-4 categories with a 1-3 rating system and a small space for comments works well.
- If possible, send all notes for a given week bundled on the same day each week
- Require parent signatures for important communications
- **Reserve one bright color, like red, for very important documents that must be dealt with, like field trip permission slips.**
- Consider having each child carry a small notebook back and forth each day for communications for and from parents.
- If there is any chance of getting all your parents on email –do it!

Community and Team Building

- Early in the year do an art project to make something wearable that is similar for everyone for example tie dye T-shirts, or decorated bandanas.
- **Allow (with guidance) students to come up with a code of behavior for the class. Have each student sign it.**
- Do team building games and activities. Here is a link to some good ones:
<http://www.learn-line.nrw.de/angebote/greenline/lernen/downloads/team.pdf>

- Create a craft project in which everyone contributes such as a class quilt, decorating a stool for the front of the room, a mural, a class flag etc.
- plant a garden outside your classroom
- adopt a class pet
- **Create a fictional class mascot.** The mascot can be invisible or you can use a stuffed animal. [Here is a Minds in Bloom post with some tips.](#)
- Make up a class cheer e.g.: 2...4....6....8 Room 16 is really great!
- Use one or two phrases inclusive phrases repeatedly throughout the year, e.g.: “First graders cooperate” “Kids in room 9 always try their best!”
- Address them as “friends” as opposed to “boys and girls” “class” etc.
- Use terminology that is positive and inclusive e.g.: “It’s good to know that we can depend on Jake to clean off the white board
- Use lots of student art and work to decorate the room
- **Take pictures of the kids frequently, print and post in a central location. Change pictures often. As your remove pictures, send them home with kids.**
- Work together on a service project e.g. collecting canned goods, singing at a retirement home, putting together school supplies to send overseas etc.
- Go on as many field trips as you can manage
- **Decorate with posters that send positive messages e.g.: “Kindness counts!” “Attitude is Everything”** [Here are some you might want to try](#)
- Frequently have students give each other specific, positive comments. e.g.: after an oral presentation, after a class game or discussion, after sharing etc.
- Recognize students who go out of their way to help or be kind to other students.
- **Group and pair kids frequently. Change the groupings, possibly use Popsicle sticks to group or pair randomly. Every kid should expect to work with any other kid in the room at anytime.** [Here is a Minds in Bloom Post on Making Group Work Work](#)
- Make it clear that negative comments toward classmates is never acceptable
- Act and talk as if your class is the best one you have ever had and you can’t believe how incredible they are. When they disappoint you (are rude to a substitute, for example) act surprised, as if you can hardly believe that this group of students could have possibly done such a thing.

Conferences

- Try to have alternative times in the early morning or evening for parents who can’t get away during the day
- Send a reminder a day or two before conferences begin
- Send report cards home a day or two ahead of time so valuable conference time is not taken up by parent’s reading report cards
- Have examples of student work and assessments ready
- If you are delivering bad news, keep your language focused on behaviors or academic progress rather than making comments about the student himself

- If you are using the conference to solve a problem, have a plan in mind when you come into the conference, but be sure and get the parent's input as well. Get the parent onboard with the plan before he or she leaves.
- If you are using the conference time to solve a problem, write the plan down with the parent and have the parent sign off on it. Consider including the student as well in this conference and have him or her sign off as well.
- If you are delivering bad news, be sure and surround it with lots of positives.
- Always start and end the conference with positives.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the parent that you will find out ASAP and get back to them, and then make sure to do just that.
- Take notes during conferences
- If a parent scares you, be sure there is another adult in the room or at the very least, leave the door open.

Correcting papers

- Use stamps and stickers liberally for younger grades
- Use self correcting as much as possible
- Maybe you don't have to correct everything. Consider spot correcting especially for workbooks.
- Swapping papers to correct can be hurtful to struggling students.
- Parent helpers can correct objective work like spelling tests and rote math
- If you have a past student who likes to come back to visit, put them to work correcting – especially if they are a few years older than the grade you teach
- Some teachers like to file corrected paper in individual student folders for easy pass-back.
- Use a color other than red – green and purple are nice. Use the same color consistently
- Flair pens rock
- Write scores in positives, not negatives e.g.: +35/50, not -15

Curriculum Night/Back to School Night

- Parents only
- Have sign-up sheets for classroom volunteers and first conference
- Refreshments are a nice touch
- Have student work adorning the walls. Parents love to find their kid's work.
- Display text books and other curriculum materials you will be using.
- If you are collecting money for fieldtrips, supplies etc, now is a good time
- **It can be fun to have students write a note to their parents to read at their desks, or a "How well do you know your child" survey on folded paper where parents fill in what they think their kid's favorite colors, activities, books etc. are and then unfold the paper to check the answers that their kids wrote.**
- Encourage parents to write a note back to their kids.

- **A class handbook is a great thing to distribute at this. Class handbooks can include:**
 - Classroom rules and expectations
 - Discipline system
 - Classroom Procedures
 - Class schedule
 - Homework expectations
 - Grading and assessments
 - Tips for helping students learn
 - Information about curriculum programs that will be used
 - Class roster
 - Contact information
- Start on time
- Avoid going through the handbook page by page. Highlight a few of the important points and assume the parents can read.
- Leave time for questions

Fast Finishers (those students who are always done first)

- **Have extensions to the original assignment ready. Ideally it should be something interesting and challenging, not just more of what they already finished.**
- Sudoku
- Have a puzzle table with various special puzzles – tangrams, pentominoes, soma cube, happy cubes, etc. Rotate them throughout the year.
- Laminate pages from Puzzlemania or Mathmania and let kids solve them with overhead pens so they can be used again and again.
- **Have a supply of brain-teaser type activities copied and ready for use as enrichment.** I create a lot of these. Here is a link to the [Creative and Critical Thinking part of my TpT store](#)
- Journal - [here are some good prompts](#)
- Work on Writing Workshop
- Silent read
- Keyboard practice
- [Task Cards](#) or Center Activities.
- **If you have a kid that is always far ahead, set them up on an independent learning project about something that he or she is really interested in.**

Getting Along

- Making your classroom a place where children feel safe and accepted is not always easy. Use many different strategies.
- Make respect and kindness big values in your classroom. Reward it when you see it.
- Class meetings are a good way for students to feel empowered and get their concerns dealt with.

- Create a [Character Trait of the Week](#) program. During the week, have students write about, role play, discuss and demonstrate the concept you are focusing on.
- Role-playing can work well to learn constructive ways to deal with difficult situations.
- Have students journal about how they can treat each others with kindness or how to deal with difficult social situations.
- **If two kids have had a conflict, try sitting them across a table from each other. Often, they can work it out on their own.**
- If you are mediating a conflict, be sure each child has a chance to talk. Try to get the kids to come up with a way to solve the conflict before offering suggestions.
- If you have a student who is socially neglected (no one really notices him or her) help the student to get involved with other kids. Assign especially sensitive kids to be his or her partner.
- If you have a student who is socially rejected (no one likes them), work on basic social skills. Kids can improve their social standing by improving their social skills. Conference with parents.
- **Just one friend in the life of a rejected or neglected child can make a big difference. Try to encourage a friendship, if possible.**
- Try these [free friendship social skills prompt cards](#).
- Find ways to reward kindness
- **If you tell the class that bullies and ringleaders often pick on others because they do not feel good about themselves and putting others down makes them feel better, kids might think twice before casting themselves into a role of someone who feels bad about themselves.**
- One way to keep kids from tattling is to have them ask themselves:
 - Does this affect me personally?
 - Is someone being hurt?
 If the answer is no to both of these, then it is tattling.
- Never let “Captains” pick kids for sides in a game.
- Stock your classroom with kid’s self-help books about getting along with others, bullying and cliques. *American Girl* has some good ones.
- Read aloud *There’s a Boy in the Girl’s Bathroom* or *The Hundred Dresses*.
- Here is a [Minds in Bloom post on Helping Kids Get Along](#)

Holidays

- Try to make art projects religiously generic so that everyone can participate
- Have something fun ready for the Jehovah Witnesses and other kids who are not allowed to celebrate holidays to do while you celebrate.
- Some ways to integrate holidays into math
 - Write story problems with holiday themes. [You can find a bunch of free ones here.](#)
 - Do a tally and graph assignment (e.g.: favorite kind of Halloween candy)
 - Cooking project with a holiday recipe (good for measurement, fractions)

- Practice basic facts with a holiday-based coloring sheet (Kids color different parts certain colors based on the answers to math problems)
- If you don't have time/energy to make Valentine mailboxes, assign it as homework.
- If you don't want kids to bring treats for birthdays, an alternative is to have them donate a special birthday book to the class library and share it with the class on their birthday.
- Fun things to do on April Fool's Day:
 - Turn all the desks backwards, but put the chairs forward, so kids don't realize it till they try to sit down.
 - Switch classes with another teacher, but both of you pretend to be each other and don't acknowledge that you are not the other teacher (probably best to do this for only about an hour)
 - **Have kids write a note home pretending that they are writing because they are in trouble for doing something bad. Put April Fools on the back and fold it in such a way that parents will see the note first. Kids love coming up with ways they may have misbehaved.**
- Gifts for parents (Xmas, Mother's Day etc.)
 - **Take a picture of each student and have them make the frames from:**
 - **play dough- paint it and stick a magnet on the back for a fridge magnet**
 - **popsicle sticks**
 - **jigsaw puzzle pieces**
 - **branches and things from nature**
 - **Tag board and glitter**
 - **Tag board and magazines – a collage frame**
 - A plant in a decorated flower pot
 - Pin made from a large jigsaw puzzle piece and glitter
 - Play dough painted pendant
 - Coupon books (great for working on those computer skills)
 - A calendar – kids make art, you print out the calendar
 - Votive candle holder painted with glass paint
 - Vase – Jar covered in torn tissue paper painted with glue
 - Dip or sand candles
 - Decorated box
 - Book mark
- **MadLibs make great teacher gifts from you. They are cheap, fun and educational.**

Homework

- Send a note about homework expectations home at the start of the year.
- Weekly packets make life easier, but some say that daily homework is better for learning.
- Give a certain type of homework for each day of the week so students will know what to expect for example:

- Monday – Spelling
- Tuesday – Math
- Wednesday – Grammar
- Thursday – Science or Social Studies + study for spelling test
- Friday – Any unfinished work from the week
- Have students use a homework folder
- **Post assignments on your class website**
- Use your classroom outgoing voice message for homework assignments
- **Give every kid 3 “Homework Passes” at the start of the year that they can turn in instead of their homework – everyone needs a break sometimes**
- For long-term projects begin with a packet that includes:
 - Overview of project
 - Calendar with due dates for each section of the project
 - Grading Rubric
 - Place for parent to sign acknowledging that they have read all the information.
- If you have your students use a planner:
 - If possible, post assignments at the start of the day so kids have all day to write them down. When planners are done right at the end of the day, slower kids may not get all the assignments written down.
 - Some kids really hate their planners. Try making it a little more fun – let them use markers to write down assignments, give out stickers, add in fun entries like kid’s birthdays or holidays.
 - Each day, spot check 2 or 3 planners. Possibly, give a small reward if it is up to date.
 - Have parents sign-off at least for the first few weeks
 - Planners are a great place to learn and practice abbreviations
- **More isn’t necessarily better. According to statements by the National PTA and the National Education Association (NEA), the following amounts of homework are recommended:**
 - **From kindergarten to third grade, no more than 20 minutes per day.**
 - **From fourth to sixth grade, 20 to 40 minutes per day.**
- Consider posting a check-off sheet near the homework bin. Students check the assignment off when they turn it in so you can easily check who has and has not done their homework.
- Assign each child a number. Numbers go in the upper right corner. Put papers in numerical order and you can easily tell whose is missing.
- Every so often, give fun homework e.g.: a tally or survey that you will use in a math lesson, interview questions to be used for a writing assignment, critical thinking skills worksheets, etc.

Lending Materials

- Get pencils labeled with your name
- **Have students swap a shoe when they borrow a pencil**

- Make it a rule that borrowed pencils are sharpened before they are returned
- Have each child bring 2 boxes of pencils and 2 packages of notebook paper at the start of the year– one for their own use, and one to be put with general classroom supplies for everyone to use.
- Decide it is a battle not worth fighting and just keep restocking the pencil bin.
- Attach a large piece of brightly colored tape to your loaner materials
- Make pencils and pens into flowers.
- Use a check out system for expensive materials

Morning routine

- Make expectations clear about what students need to do and when they need to have it all done by (put away backpack, turn in homework, make sure pencils are sharpened etc.)
- Greet each child by name every morning, possibly with a handshake or high-five.
- Put a different interesting or inspirational quote on the board each morning.
- Consider having students lead all the morning routines – taking attendance and lunch count, doing calendar, leading the pledge.
- **Have students move magnets, clothespins or popsicle sticks with their names on them to indicate that they are present and what their lunch choice is.**
- Always have an activity (Morning work, Bell work, etc.) ready on their desks or on the board for students to work on when they arrive. Some ideas include
 - [a journal question or topic](#)
 - math review
 - [critical thinking worksheet](#)
 - editing (finding the errors)
- **Consider making that first activity a fun one like a brain teaser or intriguing journal question rather than a review or rote activity so that kids will look forward to coming to school each day.**

Noisy Classroom

- Use a monitoring system so that you can give student a visual representation of their noise level...when it gets to a certain level, they start losing recess time or have to go to silent work mode, or whatever consequence you set up. Some ideas include
 - A traffic light (green is fine, yellow is getting too loud, red means a consequence)
 - A noise thermometer (a strip of red Velcro makes good mercury)
 - Using 1,2, and 3 as a noise scale – just write them on the board.
- Dim the lights when noise levels get too high
- Play quiet, classical or new-age music.
- Have a parent monitor
- Assign a student monitor
- Use a reminder chime. Make sure this chime is only used for noise

- Give students 1-3 minutes of talk time before you start a lesson or expect them to work silently. The idea is to kind of get it out of their system so they will be ready to focus.

Organization

- Use cardboard or plastic paper bins – the ones that stack so that you can easily organize different kinds of paper or worksheets. Shoe bins work well for this too.
- **Label sections of a shelf by day of the week or subject, as you copy worksheets for the week, put them on the appropriate spot.**
- Deal with papers from your mailbox immediately. Don't let them stack up
- Make a file folder for each student – keep information and work for making portfolios
- Have a bin for notes from parents
- **Put classroom supplies like extra crayons, scissor, paper etc. all in one place.**
- Student desks
 - If you use tables instead of desks, use bins for school supplies.
 - If you have desks with one large compartment, consider getting large shallow bins that fit inside. This makes the desk into a drawer, making materials easy to access and to keep organized
 - **Keep supplies limited and under control by being specific on your start of the year supply list e.g.: instead of saying “box of crayons”, say “Box of 24 crayons”**
 - If desks are overflowing, consider adding bins on top of the desk for commonly used materials or bins stored on shelves for materials that are rarely used
 - Spot check student desks
 - Give a small treat to students who manage to keep their desktop nametags clean and unturned all year.
- Student paper organization
 - **Pocket folders are much easier for younger children than 3-Ring binders.**
 - If you really like using a 3-Ring Binders, consider using pocket folders for the subjects – makes filing papers easier and quicker.
 - If you do require students to use 3-Ring Binders, commit to hole punching everything before you distribute
 - Require students to clean out binders or folders at least once a month, ideally once a week
- Consider using folders for:
 - homework
 - unfinished work
 - long term projects
- Is your classroom too neat? Crowded, messy classrooms are unpleasant and difficult to work in, but the ultra-neat classroom can be a little spooky too. Some teachers keep things neat by severely limiting what comes into the classroom and

staying away from big, messy projects. This can mean limited materials, stunted student independence, and little room for creativity.

Rewards

- Extra recess or free choice time
- Computer time
- Getting to sit with friend at lunch
- Getting to choose where desk will be
- Parties
- Treats – air-popped popcorn is easy (especially if a parent makes it) and not unhealthy
- Playing a game at the end of the day
- Line leader
- Stickers
- Colorful pencils

Restless Students

- **Provide restless students with something quiet and non-distracting to do with their hands during instruction times – those squishy balls work great.**
- Allow kids to draw during read-aloud times
- Have students take notes.
- Sitting on large exercise balls seems to help some restless kids
- **Have a secret signal to use with specific children so that instead of correcting them you can just make eye contact and touch your ear, or whatever and that child will know to stop doing whatever distracting thing he or she is doing without you having to use a public correction.**
- When students are getting antsy take a [Brain Break](#): play a quick round of Simon Says, sing a song like Head, Shoulders Knees and Toes, or just stretch.
- Have students sit on the carpet for some types of instruction
- **Do something novel – let kids turn their chairs around so they straddle the backs, let them sit on their desks, have them put their chairs in a circle.**
- Use desktop nametags as “no touch” zones when you are giving instructions during art and science
- Use a monitoring/reward system so that the student knows which behaviors to work on. Charts, tokens, tickets and notes home work well.
- If you are struggling with wiggly students, you may want to look at this series called [Advice from the OT](#), which will tell you exactly why your students struggle to attend and how you can help.

Silent Reading

- Call it something fun (please not SSR):
 - DEAR – Drop Everything And Read

- DIRT- Dear, It's Reading Time
- NIB – Nose In Book
- RIF – Reading is Fun
- **Let kids read wherever they want in the room. Create cozy reading nooks.**
- Allow each child to bring a pillow or stuffed animal from home to snuggle up with while reading.
- Expect students to have a book ready when silent reading time begins so that you don't have them rummaging through the class library while everyone else is reading.
- **Keep multiple copies of one of your favorite books handy. If a student doesn't have a book hand him/her a copy. Already read it – too bad, not interested – too bad. That is THE book. Next time the student is likely to remember to have a book ready.**
- Once a month require every student to read a specific genre e.g.: biographies, poetry, historical fiction, etc. Encourage students to bring their own books, but also stock the classroom library with many choices.
- Have a read-in day. Some schools do this on Dr. Seuss's birthday. Kids can wear PJs, bring pillows etc.
- Try to avoid using silent reading time as make up time for kids who have not finished their work. They may be the ones who need silent reading the most.
- Be a model and read during this time. Even if you have a ton to do.

Sponge Activities (got 5 extra minutes?)

- Quick oral quiz on whatever you've been studying
- Review math facts
- [Mental Math](#)
- Trivia questions
- ["Would You Rather Questions"](#)
- [Tribond questions](#)
- Questions from *The Kids' Book of Questions* or [some of these](#)
- [Do a MadLib](#)
- Share appreciations
- Sing
- Active game or stretch
- Read out loud
- Quick room or desk clean up

Substitutes

- A good sub is a treasure...a bad one a disaster that you will have to clean up when you return. So keep the names of those good ones so you can request them!
- If you know you are going to have a sub, prep your students. Make it clear you are depending on them to treat the sub with respect and that you will be getting a full report. Bribes are not a bad thing at this point - a few extra marbles in the jar

or an extra 5 minutes of recess when you return can make a big difference for your sub.

- Keep your sub folder in a really obvious place. Every student in your class should know where it is.
- Here are some suggestions for what to put in the folder:
 - List of students/seating chart
 - List of students who are dependable helpers
 - List of students with life-threatening allergies/medical needs - bright paper, front and center!
 - Students with special needs - who they are, what they need
 - Map of the school (bathroom and teacher's lounge highlighted)
 - Name/numbers of a colleagues who can help if needed
 - Classroom rules and procedures (how hall passes are handled, what students may do when finished early, attention signals, lunch routine, discipline, homework, etc.)
 - Instructions/passwords for computer, copier, other technology.
 - Weekly schedule - recesses, specialists, kids who leave for weekly appointments/special classes etc.
 - Emergency plans for a 2 complete days
 - Filler activities
 - Emergency Drill (fire, earthquake, lockdown etc.) instructions
- If your sub will be blessed with planning time while your students are at a specialists, by all means put him or her to work. A sub can grade papers, take down/put up bulletin board, make copies, use the paper cutter etc.
- Be sure to ask your sub to leave a report about how the day went - students who were particularly helpful - or not.
- Don't forget to thank the sub for being there.

Technology

- For everything you do, ask yourself “Would this be easier using the computer?”
Some things that might be include:
 - Grade book
 - Lesson plans/plan book
 - Report cards/progress reports
 - Presenting new material (PowerPoint)
 - Communications with parents and colleagues
 - Creating worksheets/word searches/math facts etc.
 - Finding clipart
 - Making posters and banners
- Remember to back up everything!

- Student use of computers is great for:
 - Research
 - Online sites that can supplement/enrich classroom teaching
 - Writing Workshop published works
 - Using PowerPoint for research reports
 - Making charts
 - Online email pal with students from another country
- Allow students to communicate with you by email
- **Give your classroom computers cute names (let the kids name them)**
- Have each student create a folder for their documents. If your system is networked, they can access their folder from every computer, if not, consider having students bring in thumb drives to save their documents on. Thumb drives are great for projects that can be worked on at home and school.
- **Create a class website and really use it. Great for:**
 - Displaying information about classroom procedures for parents
 - Posting daily homework assignments
 - Classroom calendars
 - Class Newsletter
 - Long-term assignment information
 - Showing off student work (never post last names!)
 - An interactive class blog (ask questions, kids answer them and comment)
 - Photo albums of students and class activities (with parental permission)
 - Posting links to background material on units you are studying or just sites you think are worthwhile for kids and parents

VIP/Star of the Week etc.

- If possible, schedule VIP weeks at the start of the year so kids will know when their week is.
- Try to schedule VIP to coincide with birthdays
- Be the first VIP – a great way to demonstrate and for your students to get to know you.
- It is fun if the VIP has something special to do each day. Some ideas:
 - Share photos and information sheet
 - Share a special book, collection or possession
 - Invite family members to lunch
 - Share a special treat
 - Eat with a friend in the Book Corner or at the teacher's desk
 - Lead a short game or activity
 - Get to be the line leader all week long
 - Wear a special hat, crown or button (younger kids)
 - **On Friday, each child can make a page for a special book for the VIP with a picture and a positive comment. VIP decorates the covers.**
- Here is a Minds in Bloom Post for [Star of the Week](#).

Volunteers

- Use them! As much as possible.
- Ask for classroom volunteers at the start of the year. Have specific jobs (e.g.: party planner, art docent etc.) as well as a space for parents who want to be “on call” for special projects.
- **If you really need a helper and no one volunteers, try asking someone personally face-to-face. Often people will say yes when you do this.**
- Ideally, do some kind of volunteer training, at the very least, give each volunteer a handout with expectations (confidentiality, professional behavior etc.). Require signatures.
- High school kids can sometimes help in an elementary classroom for credit. If you can get one of those – do it!
- Senior citizens make great helpers especially for working with individual students. Some retirement homes have programs, and many kids have grandparents.
- Have jobs that you can send home with students for parents who can't come into the classroom e.g.: cutting out stencils, dealing with book club orders
- **Use parents for those jobs that just suck up your valuable time. Some ideas:**
 - Putting up, taking down children's art and other bulletin board items.
 - Copying
 - Using the paper cutter
 - Correcting things you don't need to comment on –spelling, math.
 - Setting up, helping with and cleaning up messy art and science projects
 - Collating and stapling papers
 - Distributing end-of-the-week papers into mailboxes
 - Planning and implementing parties
 - Labeling books and classroom materials
 - Fieldtrip drivers and chaperons
 - Guest speakers
 - Reading aloud to the class
 - Working with individual students
 - Listening to individual students read aloud
 - Manning a center
 - Monitoring a literature circle
 - Monitoring classroom
 - Every aspect of Book-club ordering and distributing
 - Organizing and implementing fund raisers
 - Making costumes, props, scenes for a classroom production
 - Putting together and end-end-of-the-year year book or photo album
- At the end of the year, do some kind of Volunteer Recognition – even if it is just a handwritten thank you card.

White Board

- Keep non-dry erase markers away from the white board. It is surprising how many teachers don't do this

- **If someone accidentally uses permanent markers on your white board, try tracing the lines with a dry-erase marker, this often works.**
- Figure out which brands/colors leave a trace mark behind after you erase that is hard to get off and then...don't use them (seems obvious but...)!
- Colors cost the same as black or blue. Why limit your options?
- **You can get magnetic white board erasers – very handy.**
- If your district does not supply ample white board markers, have each child bring them as part of their school supplies at the start of the year.
- A white board on an movable easel is a great addition if you have limited white board space.
- **Consider [small, personal white boards](#) for your students. A sock can be used for an eraser. They are great for:**
 - printing practice
 - math
 - quick quizzes
 - spelling practice
 - partner quizzes
 - class games – allows everyone to answer
 - fun
- If you have any choice about your classroom's whiteboard, get a magnetic one!
- For a quick way to post the schedule, have subjects written out on laminated sentence strips with magnets on the back. Then you just have to write the times on the board and move the strips. [Here are some for just a dollar.](#)
- **Have each child's name on a magnet so that you can use the white board to create groups or track progress on a project by moving the magnets.**

Everything Else

- If you are trying to work on a specific teaching skill, like speaking more slowly or remember to give students processing time before calling on someone for an answer, post a reminder for yourself at the back of the classroom on bright paper. It can just be initials – PT for processing time.
- Video cameras are great learning tools. Tape yourself, tape your students. Also good if you have parents who refuse to believe that their child is having a problem.
- **If you are doing something that causes a distracting reaction in your students – for example dissecting an cow eyeball (kids are all making noises of disgust) or using anatomically correct terms during a health lesson (kids are giggling) give them a few minutes to have their reaction – acknowledge it. And then move on with the expectation that those behaviors are out of their systems and they are ready to focus.**
- When students need teacher assistance, have them put their name on the board instead of raising their hand or waiting at your desk. Then they can move on to the next question/activity until you get to them.

- Put brain teasers, spelling words, flashcards etc. on the wall where kids line up before or after recess. They might learn something during a time that is usually wasted.
- Use educational supply stores and catalogs for ideas –you can make a lot of the stuff they have there and customize it for your classroom.
- Have this year’s students write letters to the student who will sit at their desk next year giving advice about how to thrive in your classroom.
- Follow your favorite TpT sellers on facebook. Many of us post links to not only our own products, but great freebies and ideas that we come across on the web. Facebook can be an amazing resource!
- Seating arrangements matter. Here is [a Minds in Bloom Post about desk arrangement](#). Here is Charity Preston's [blog with many different possibilities](#).
- Always try to remember that your students spend more time with you than any other adult in their lives –even their parents.

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