

# 15 Things I Wish I'd Known Before Becoming a Teacher

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## **1. Relating to every student takes research.**

If you're like me, you are decades older than your students. It takes research to figure out what prior knowledge you're building on. Don't just focus on what they've learned in school, but think about what they've learned outside of school. What programs do they watch on TV? What do they read for fun? What kind of music do they listen to? You can ask your students this information and more in simple survey or game. Knowing them and who they are in the context of the world today will help you connect.

## **2. Be prepared for anything and everything to happen on your watch.**

You have to be prepared for anything to happen during school. In my first year of teaching, I got vomited on and didn't have a change of clothes. I got the stomach bug shortly thereafter and didn't have any medicine with me. I had to teach without power for three days during the aftermath of a hurricane. I had to stay at school with my last class one day until 4:00 in lock down while the police searched our school for an escaped convict. I've sewn shirts, taught with a flashlight, and written study guides out by hand when the copy machine was broken. At the time, each of these things seemed out of the norm. I learned later that "out of the norm" was the norm. Teaching is an unexpected journey that provides a great story at the end of the day. It's better to laugh at life's unexpectedness than to stress.

## **3. Student teaching may not completely prepare you for your own classroom.**

Not all student teaching experiences are rosy. And even if they are, you could end up teaching a different age group, completely different grade, or school environment.

If you haven't started teaching yet, try and choose a place that will be most like your desired job. If that's not possible, spend time in a school observing how things will work and what you need to be prepared for.

## **4. What you want to teach may not be in demand when you look for a job.**

Teachers are always needed, right? True...to some extent. Teachers *are* always needed, but what kind of teacher and where varies widely depending on area growth, retirement rate, and state budgets. The best advice I can give prospective teachers is to get a sense of the job market in your area before choosing a focus.

## **5. Working with parents is hard.**

Teacher training doesn't focus a lot of time on how teachers can best work with parents, but it's a crucial part being a teacher. My first year teaching, I had a parent yell at me, cry in front of me, hit on me, and even practically stalk me on my cell phone. Setting boundaries with parents in the early years is a struggle. Some years my group of parents gave me no troubles at all, while other years seemed to be full of controversy.

Working with parents is hard, but it's not impossible. The hardest parents for me were the ones that didn't realize that I cared as much about the progress of their child as they did. If you can explain- with actions and words- that you are sincere in the education of their child and exhausting all avenues to help them, they'll come around.

## **6. Your principal can be your greatest ally or biggest enemy.**

Each school is ruled by the principal. In a perfect world, good work would be rewarded with the respect of a principal. However, the world is not perfect. Principals, like the rest of us, have their quirks. Each principal has a unique way of measuring teacher success, and it's important to find that out early on.

I was the music teacher in an elementary school. It wasn't my teaching the principal was concerned with. Instead, if the PTA parents thought my musical was good, she was happy. Be bold and ask your principal exactly what they'd like to see from you in any given year. If they answer you and you measure up, you should have good things in store.

## **7. More degrees mean more pay.**

While the rest of the world works toward promotions, teachers have only [pay scales](#) related to degrees/credit hours earned. Some states now pay extra for additional certifications, too. I wish teachers could get promotions based on merit, but since that's not the norm for public schools, it's smart to keep learning. Not only will it pay off in the long run, but it'll help keep you up to date on new technologies and advances in teaching.

**8. Earning the respect of students is hard work: the older the students, the harder the work.**

I remember being right out of college and substituting in a high school. I tried to look "old" so my students would take me seriously and respect me. Little did I know it had nothing to do with my appearance. Earning respect has to start from day one. It's about being consistent, fair, and dependable as a teacher. Once you've earned their respect, all the hard work you've put into being someone they can respect is totally worth it.

**9. Getting supplies for class is sometimes impossible unless you spend your own money.**

I've taught in schools where money flows freely, but I've also taught in schools where the purse strings are tight. Be resourceful in everything you do. And if you do spend your own money, keep your receipts! I've seen many teachers post wish lists on their bulletins boards or websites. Don't be afraid to ask parents for supplies that you need or would like for an extra project. If the parents of your students are not able to help, try asking your local merchants and organizations.

**10. The day before a vacation day brings back child-like excitement.**

You can feel it in the air when you step in school the last day before a holiday break. Even if it's raining outside there's a certain buzz in the school. Teachers have a spring in their step and students seem excited to learn. Breaks are great to look forward to. They help give teachers and students renewal and refocus. The bad part? The last five minute before the bell seem to last forever.

**11. You'll make some of your best friends teaching in a school.**

The year I started teaching there were 15 other newbies in my school. A lot of turnover had taken place- people retiring and having babies. Although we were sprinkled throughout the school in different grades, subjects, and locations, we always stuck together. There were several veteran teachers that took us in and showed us the ropes. I still see almost all of the teachers that I used to teach with at that school. We can pick up a conversation like time hasn't passed.

**12. The internet is your friend.**

When I was in college and started teaching, the internet was just taking off. I can only imagine (or hope) how teaching training has changed over the years. Start a blog for self-reflection, but make it anonymous if you really want to air it all. If you feel funny about asking other teachers at your school for help, [ask a teacher on TheApple](#) for help. Again, if you want to remain anonymous, send a questions to [Dear Julia](#). Using the internet for your career can help give you insight about how your students use it and how you can incorporate technology in your teaching.

**13. Only someone who's been alone in a classroom full of students can appreciate *exactly* what your job is like.**

I have a great group of friends that are teachers. (See #11) The rest don't really understand what it's like to not sit at a desk with a phone and a computer. Most people relate to teachers from their experiences as students. And just as we don't "get" how hard jobs outside education might be, they might not fully understand our teaching jobs. Pick your teacher friends to work out issues at school; they'll be the best at listening and relating.

**14. A note of thanks from a parent or student will mean more than any gift.**

In the bottom of my night stand I have a card tucked in an old book. It's my absolute favorite note from a mom of three boys I used to teach. In it, she explains how she could tell I really cared for her boys and how much they enjoyed learning in my class. It's nothing fancy but it's hand written and honest. The best part? She wrote it two years after they'd been in my class. As a teacher, you'll get enough apples and coffee cups to fill a cabinet, but hand written notes are priceless- the best kind of evaluation of your work.

**15. Students are amazing creatures.**

Each student has a unique personality and talent. Teachers have such an interesting perspective to interact with students and watch them interact with each other as they mature. From the beginning of

the year to the last day of school, it's fascinating to watch how students grow. Each year and each new group of students is a journey different from the previous year.