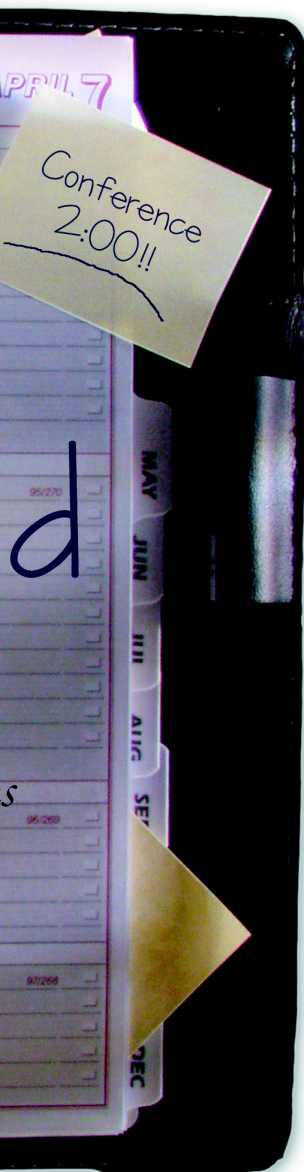


Alison Maes

What does it take to be successful in those first few years as a science teacher? Sticky notes. There are so many things to remember, questions to ask, and so little time that teachers' desks, cars, and pockets often are full of sticky notes. Although sticky notes still adorn my desk and occasionally turn up in my laundry, through years of teaching I finally have developed an organized system that works for me.



New teachers often are driven by a desire to be creative, work hard, and build an inviting learning environment. Their first week teaching is exciting and a bit nerve-racking. Soon thereafter, they inevitably become overwhelmed with the minutia associated with everyday life as a teacher. Seating charts, files and papers, meetings, lessons, and supplies dominate the mind of what was once a young, innovative teacher. In addition to the technicalities, there are all of the unknowns. They not only need help with content guidelines and creative ideas but also require organization basics and preparation techniques not taught in college.

Successful learning environments thrive in organized classrooms. Organization aids the new teacher in everyday instruction, and also provides stability for the students. The following is a rundown of organizational tips that can replace at least some of a teacher's reliance on small squares of paper. Organization, similar to teaching, is an individualized endeavor, and these techniques will not work for everyone. Numerous methods can be tailored to fit individual needs.

### What's happening today?

One of the best ways to immediately establish a sense of organiza-

tion is to write out the daily agenda on the board for students to see as soon as they enter the room. It helps to have an agenda for each subject taught. PowerPoint presentations also can be used for this same purpose. At the end of each day, teachers should write out the daily agenda for the following school day to focus on what needs to be prepared.

### Everyone have a seat

Teachers should never underestimate the value of a seating chart. I find it useful to keep one on hand at all times (Figure 1) and some schools require them. Supplies needed for the seating chart I use include a roll of magnetic tape, price stickers, a thin sheet of steel, and an equal size sheet of transparent resinous material. The magnetic tape is cut into 2 cm x 2 cm pieces, and a price sticker is placed on the sticky side of each magnet. On the first day of class, each student's first and last name is written on the price sticker and the magnets are arranged on the sheet of steel (approximately 15 cm x 95 cm). I put the magnets for first period on the left-hand portion of the steel, and each period after that to the right of the period that precedes it. I also place a clear piece of transparent resinous material (approx-

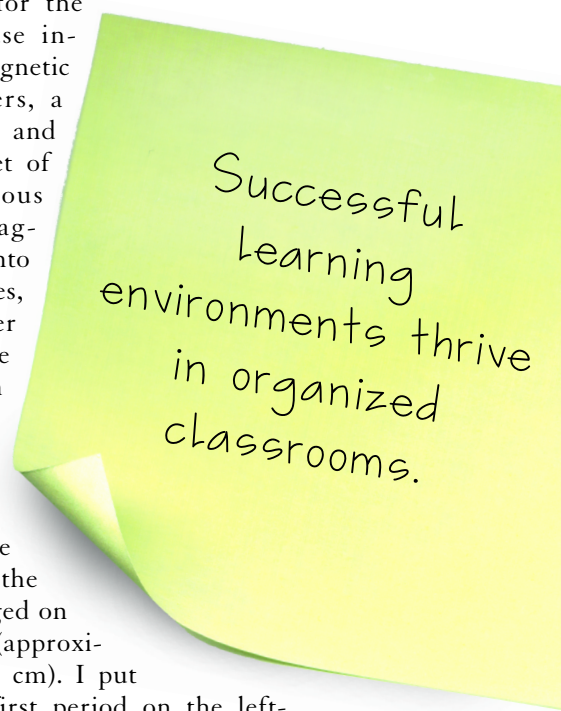
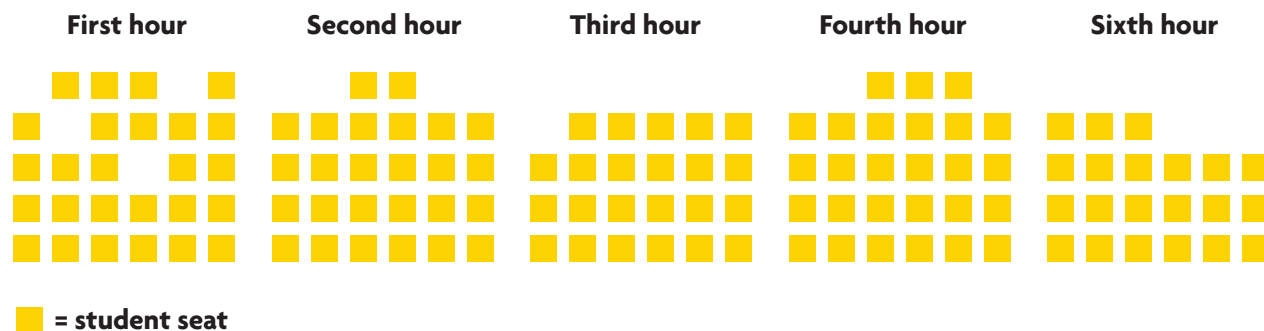


FIGURE 1

### Magnetic seating chart.

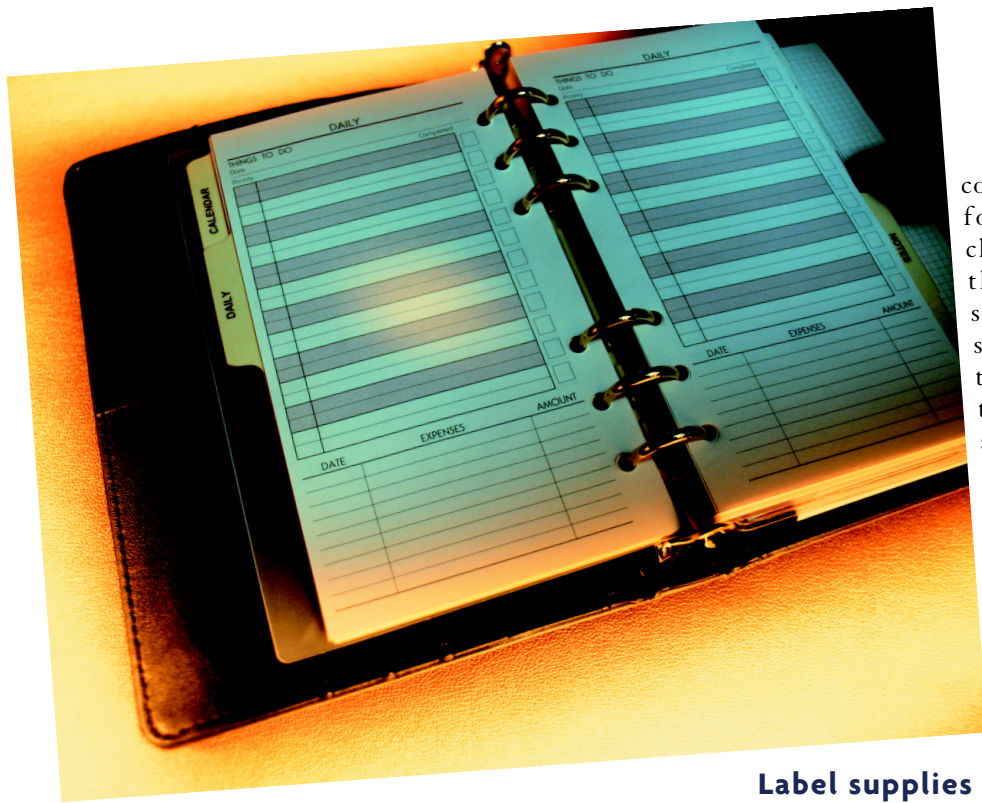




**FIGURE 2****Possible file ideas.**

File type	Description
Worksheets	Different colored file stickers can be used to differentiate between classes. Jot down any notes to remember on the outside of the file folder.
Unit files	Create a file for each unit taught and any possible subjects that may be taught or be of interest. In each file place collected activities, demos, labs, alternative assessment ideas, etc., for future use. Collect ideas from periodicals such as <i>The Science Teacher</i> , Internet resources, and text materials.
Committee	A file for each committee.
Inventory	A copy of all equipment in the science room. Include model numbers and quantities.
Science orders	A running list of items to be ordered during the purchase period for the district. Check off orders as they arrive. Postcards for shipment dates of live specimens.
Quotes	Collect quotes from periodicals, websites, and reference books. File quotes according to topics taught. Use quotes to introduce new topics in discussions. Allow students to interpret quotes and develop higher-level thinking skills. Write the date next to the quote each time that it is used so that it won't be repeated in the same class.
Emergency substitute plans	Generic, scientific method worksheets. Generic, engaging science video worksheets. General interest, science articles with corresponding worksheets.
Videos	Catalogue all videos under topic names with short descriptions. Copies of downloaded schedules for the seasons of science television shows such as <i>Assignment Discovery</i> and <i>Scientific American Frontiers</i> .
Forms	School forms for books, disciplinary actions, field trips, etc.
Articles	Create a file for each unit taught and any possible subjects that may be taught or be of interest. In each file place collected articles for future use. Collect articles from periodicals, newspapers, and the Internet.
Cartoons	Collect cartoons that include science content. Excellent sources include <i>The Far Side</i> , <i>Calvin and Hobbes</i> , and newspaper editorial cartoons. File the cartoons according to topics taught.





colored file labels and colored file folders to designate different classes or topics. In addition to these standard files, teachers should keep files for inventory, science orders, emergency substitutes, and quotes. Quotes can often be used to start class discussions. For example, scientist and mathematician Henri Poincaré stated, "Science is built of facts the way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of facts is no more a science than a pile of bricks is a house (Rawson, 1986). This is a great way to start a discussion at the beginning of a new school year.

mately 15 cm x 95 cm) over the magnets. A grease pencil works well for marking absences and tardies on the transparent resinous material. At the end of the day, attendance is transferred to an attendance book.

Once established, it is easy to make changes to the seating chart. It can also be used in a variety of ways. Different colored price stickers can be used on the magnets to designate lab partners, cooperative learning groups, or special-needs students. The seating charts also are beneficial for substitute teachers, who can easily take attendance and identify names of students. Many schools now take all attendance each hour on a computer for immediate office use, but this seating chart can still be used for organizational purposes.

### Document plans

Each week in a plan book, I organize for the next five days of teaching by putting check marks next to all parts of a lesson for which the materials and copies are prepared. I make note of anything that is needed for lessons; when they are complete, I write down any comments about how to change the lesson next time around. These notes aid in planning lessons for the following year.

### File, file, file!

In my earlier years of teaching, I clipped and copied every activity, article, or cartoon that I thought might be useful at some point in my career. I had become a pack rat and could never find the specific clipping I was looking for. While I still continue to collect, I now file everything systematically so I can easily retrieve that one item I'm looking for (Figure 2).

It helps to keep files for all standard teacher papers, such as worksheets, articles, and forms. Use

### Label supplies

Many basic supplies (Figure 3) can be purchased at dollar stores or from house and estate sales and stored in shoeboxes or plastic storage boxes. A label maker can be purchased inexpensively at an office supply store and be used to label all storage boxes.

**FIGURE 3**

### Possible basic supplies list.

First aid kit	Crazy glue
Glue guns and glue sticks	Class set of thick markers
Meter sticks	Class set of thin markers
Class set of masking tape	Class set of cellophane tape
String	Rubber bands
Straws	Sealable plastic bags
Clay	Paper plates
Plastic bowls	Plastic spoons, knives, and forks
Paper cups	Shoe boxes
Paper lunch bags	Set of tools
Sticky notes	Exacto knives
Wax pencils	Batteries
Stopwatches	Safety pins, needle, and thread
Label maker	Assorted envelopes
Sponges	Plaster of paris
Construction paper	Tweezers
Class set of scissors	



**FIGURE 4****Prompts for possible questions to ask.**

Duties beyond teaching	Teacher parking
Lunch storage and purchase	Lunch schedule
Parent-teacher conferences	Report cards
Copy machine procedures	Half-day schedule
School assembly procedures	Field trip policies
School cancellation notification	Technology usage
Arrangements for substitutes	School map
Room repairs and maintenance	Fire alarm procedures
Student attendance policies	Emergency procedures
Evaluation process for teachers	
Professional development policies	
Science teacher conferences	
Mandatory meetings schedule	
School hours for weekends and vacations	
Classroom usage by other teachers or programs	

**Don't be afraid to ask**

A large part of being organized is being prepared. The more prepared teachers are, the more confident they are, and the more confident students will be in that teacher. An important part of being prepared is asking the questions that veteran teachers take for granted. A new teacher in a new district often is just attempting to make it day to day, and events, like schoolwide assemblies and parent-teacher conferences, are the least of their daily concerns. That is, of course, until an assembly is scheduled, and the teacher has no idea how to find the auditorium.

The questions that need to be asked can vary greatly from teacher to teacher. A list of prompts for possible questions is given in Figure 4. No question is too simple. Seasoned teachers can provide great stories about waiting to meet parents for parent-teacher conferences in their classrooms while the conferences were being held in the gym, or how they got lost on the way to their own room the first day of school. For these reasons, most veteran teachers are happy to answer any and all questions.

As the school year draws to an end, new teachers will have developed their own methods of organization, collected more "stuff" than they ever thought possible, and answered questions they never dreamed would be asked. Organization techniques, like teaching techniques, will change and improve with experience. Veteran teachers have created systems for organization that have proven effective. Though sticky notes may still be prevalent in the classroom of veteran teachers, some of the teachers now have organization hints to pass on to new teachers of the future. ~

**Acknowledgment**

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