

Substitute Survival: Tools You Can Use

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Are you a substitute -- or potential substitute -- wondering whether you'll survive the challenges that lie ahead? Are you an administrator or a classroom teacher wondering how to help a substitute get through the day? If so, the Education World Online Substitute Survival Kit is for you! Included: Songs, games, lesson activities, and templates to help a sub survive even the most difficult experience!

You've signed up to be a substitute teacher, and now you're wondering whether it was *really* such a good idea? Will you be able to control the students? Will you understand fifth-grade math? Will the teacher leave detailed plans? Will it be as bad as you've heard it can be?

The kind of substituting experience you have is pretty much up to you, say the subs we talked to. All you have to do to survive, they say, is be prepared, be professional, and *never* let them see you sweat!

Be Prepared

"The first ten minutes set the tone for the whole day," Peg Arseneaux, a former classroom teacher and long-time sub from Glastonbury, Connecticut, told Education World. "Have an introduction of yourself ready. Establish the fact that you are you and not the regular teacher. Point out that things will be a little different and that that's OK. It could even be fun! This is especially important with younger kids.

"I usually tell students that I have only two rules," Arseneaux says. "Don't talk when I'm talking, and be respectful. I'll add more rules if they're needed, and I tell the kids that as well. If you get them under control right away, your day should go pretty well."

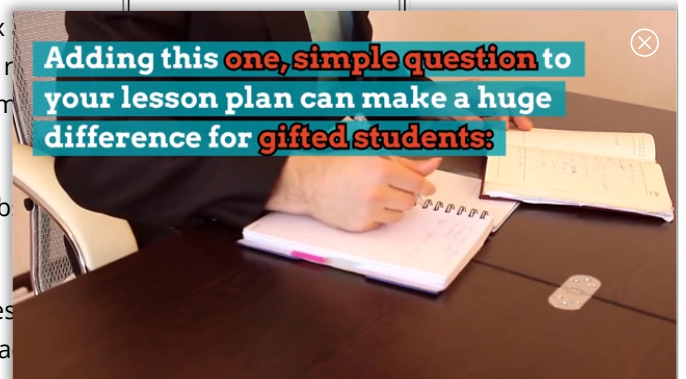
Over the years, Arseneaux has developed some rules for substitute teachers that can help your day go smoothly too:

- Arrive at your assignment earlier than requested, especially if it's the first time you've been in that particular tea

The Substitute Teacher Bag o' Tricks

Most substitute

Adding this one, simple question to your lesson plan can make a huge difference for gifted students:



class.

- Familiarize yourself with the physical set up of the room.
- Follow the plans that are left for you. Don't disregard them and do your own thing. If you have questions, ask other grade-level teachers.
- Correct all the work the students do and leave it for the teacher to see. (I usually don't correct creative writing assignments because they're so subjective.) Try to keep track of who finished what and leave that information for the teacher too.
- Leave a full report about what you did and did not cover as far as lesson plans are concerned. Also mention student behavior, especially positive things. If any major negative episodes occur, write down what happened and also fill in another teacher or the aide.
- Don't shut yourself up in the classroom. Go to the teacher's room and introduce yourself. The more you're seen, the more jobs you'll get.

(Click here for more [Tips for Subs](#), including strategies, techniques, and professional advice.)

Never Let Them See You Sweat

"I like the flexibility subbing provides," Arseneaux told Education World. "And I like the fact that I can actually teach without having to worry about the daily ins and outs of the regular classroom teacher's administrative duties. What I *don't* like is getting those 5 a.m. computer calls telling me there's a job for me and then having to push the right buttons on the phone, in the dark, to get the assignment.

"Another thing I don't like," Arseneaux added, "is not having clear instructions on morning routines and having to look for such items as attendance cards and lunch slips.

"Of course, the absolute worst situation is not having sufficiently detailed plans to work from," said Arseneaux. "It's not necessary to provide minute-by-minute instructions, but subs need more direction than '9:00 to 9:45 -- language arts' and a couple of teacher's guides tossed on the desk.

"That doesn't happen to me very often, though," Arseneaux pointed out. "Usually, even when a lesson goes more quickly than anticipated, the teacher has provided a folder with extra work in it. If you use that folder, be sure you let the teacher know what you did. If you can't find anything left by the teacher, other teachers from the same grade level can be very helpful. If all else fails, I use some of the following tried and true techniques:

- * extra pencils, marking pens, dry erase markers, and chalk
- * stickers or an ink stamp and a pad
- * name tags and hall passes
- * Band-Aids
- * seating chart forms
- * sub folder forms
- * teacher report forms
- * daily schedule forms
- * a variety of "personal favorite" lessons, worksheets, games, and activities along with materials needed to complete the activities
- * brief literature selections for a variety of grade levels
- * a cassette recorder and musical tapes for a variety of grade levels
- * educational videos
- * small items to be used as rewards or motivators
- * a whistle
- * sunscreen and a sun hat or a warm hat, a scarf, and gloves
- * jogging or flat shoes.

- **Sing!** Teach primary students a song they might not already know -- such as "Biscuits in the Oven," by Raffi or the kids' version of [Shake, Rattle, and Roll](#). [Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes](#) is also a favorite with young students. The songs all have motions and are very lively and easy to learn. You might ask students to teach you *their* favorite song.
- **Play!** Kids of all ages like games. Try [Games That Teach](#). Hangman is fun, but be sure to establish the rules before you start to play. Twenty Questions is a game that older students can enjoy.
- **Read!** Get a book from the classroom shelves, another teacher, the school library, or your bag of tricks. Sometimes a simple art project, such as drawing a picture of a favorite part of a story or a different ending, can add interest to a reading activity *and* stretch the time. Students might also write a sound script for a poem by supplying different sounds for each stanza or mood.
- **Write!** Most students today have writing journals. If they don't, provide them with one of Education World's printable [Writing Bug work sheets](#) or distribute paper and provide them with a list of possible topics from [Writing Prompts/Journal Topics](#). You might also let students write about anything they want. Allowing them to write about their impressions of the substitute can be very amusing -- depending on the group!
- **Homework!** Let the students start their homework. This always goes over big and helps give you a 'good guy' image.
- **Manage!** Some quick classroom-management ideas can also come in handy. Write the word *RECESS* on the chalkboard and erase a letter each time you have to correct the class. Each erased letter results in five minutes of lost recess time. Another favorite is to have students make flowers out of construction paper and tape each one to a drinking straw 'stem.' Throughout the day, look for students who are behaving well and staying on task. Each time you catch a student being good, write his or her name on a flower and place it in a flowerpot or vase. At the end of the day, leave a 'bouquet' for the classroom teacher.

You might also try one of the quick and easy [lesson plans](#) Education World has put together for you this week!

Be Professional

"Of course, there are some things you can't control, no matter how well prepared you think you are," Arseneaux pointed out. "There was the time, for example, when a second grader got on the wrong bus to go home because she wanted to be with her friends, or the time I discovered from a teacher's lesson plans that I was the only grade-level teacher going on a field trip to the museum!

"At times like those," Arseneaux said, "all you can do is do your best and hope for the best" -- and use every trick in your Education World Substitute Teacher Survival Kit!

ACTIVITY TOOLS

The following sites will help you create activities and lessons to use when the permanent teacher's plans run a little short!

- [Puzzlemaker](#)
Create and print your own word searches, crossword puzzles, and mazes.
- [Brain Teasers](#)
Houghton Mifflin provides math-related brainteasers for students in grades 3 through 8.
- [Writing Prompts/Journal Topics](#)
CanTeach, a site that provides lesson plans, resources, and links with a Canadian focus, offers a list of writing prompts.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Find more substitute teacher information at the sites below.

- [How to Substitute Teach](#)
About.com provides a number of tips to make a substitute's life easier.
- [A Packet for Substitute Teachers](#)
- This 'packet' on a page contains enough ideas, activities, suggestions, puzzles and riddles, and links to useful sites to help a substitute survive even the most difficult days.
- [Substitute Teaching Tricks of the Trade](#)
This site, containing excerpts from a book on substitute teaching, provides practical and useful advice on a variety of relevant topics.

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