

My first semester of teaching has been incredibly helpful in teaching me how to manage the classroom environment. I feel that I will be far better prepared when I begin teaching next semester's students than I was when I began this August.

- I have learned to always, always have a backup lesson. Classes have moods just as individuals have moods, and some days a class simply is not in the mood to cooperate with the lesson I had planned. If I can't teach my students by showing them a film adaptation of the previous night's reading assignment, I should be able to pull a set of discussion questions out of my notebook and use them in small-group or whole-class instruction. Forging ahead with a lesson that is incompatible with the class's mood that day would be setting myself up for a major discipline problem -- as I have, unfortunately, discovered first-hand.
- I have learned that students expect the teacher to have a consistent progression of disciplinary actions. Because I believe that a child sitting in the principal's office is a child who is not learning anything, I try to keep my students in my classroom as much as possible. Therefore, I am willing to give a few warnings -- depending, of course, on the seriousness of the offense.

After two or three verbal corrections, however, some other action must be taken. I prefer giving writing assignments designed to help the student understand that his or her actions affect others, often in negative ways.

If disruptive or inappropriate behavior continues, the student's parent or guardian must be contacted, either through a phone call or letter home. Any parental contact should be documented with the date, time, reason for the contact, and the parent's reaction.

As inappropriate behavior becomes more consistent, I prefer that parental contact take the form of a letter requesting that the student be given a ride home from after-school detention. Parents who might shrug off an annoying phone call often become seriously disgruntled when they have to come pick their student up.

I feel that sending students to the office with a disciplinary referral should be saved as a last resort or as the response to the most serious infractions. Time out of class is time wasted, and besides, the administration tends to like me better when I don't plague them with troublemakers.

- I have learned that no matter how idealistic I might feel about the idea that "a brand-new day is a fresh start," using this philosophy as a classroom management plan is courting disaster. Students must understand that if they reached the parental-contact stage yesterday, they will start over at the warning stage today. I regret that I spent several weeks "starting over" every day before realizing that I spent every day losing valuable instructional time by warning the same students over and over for the same misbehaviors.

- I have learned that bored students are misbehaving students -- something I knew intellectually but had never experienced before I entered my own classroom. I know that if I can't hold my students' attention, I am going to have trouble in my classroom.
- I have learned that no matter how interested a student might be doing an activity today, if he or she continues to do that activity for more than two or three days in a row, ennui will set in -- destroying not only that student's attention span but also his or her discipline.

I realize that in many ways, I have (so far) been fortunate this semester. My administrator will back me up against students and parents, support me as I learn to avoid and correct problems, and give me advice whenever I ask for it. My students have not been quite as destructive and uncooperative as other students might have been. The parents I've dealt with thus far have been quite reasonable, even when they clearly disapproved of the actions I took in my classroom. Any of that could change at any time, but I feel that with the valuable lessons I have learned already, I am better equipped to act professionally and productively in whatever situations the future might bring.