

STARTING RIGHT

Your first weeks of teaching will not be easy, but they can be exciting and rewarding — if you're prepared. Task management, organization, realistic expectations and a positive attitude will go a long way.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

1. Adopt effective task management strategies, and start practicing them immediately.
2. Identify and commit to a basic classroom behavior management plan that you will use consistently.
3. Learn what to expect by talking with other teachers and exploring things learned by first-year agriculture instructors across the nation. Incorporate their insights into your plans.
4. Prepare and use a calendar for organization each day.

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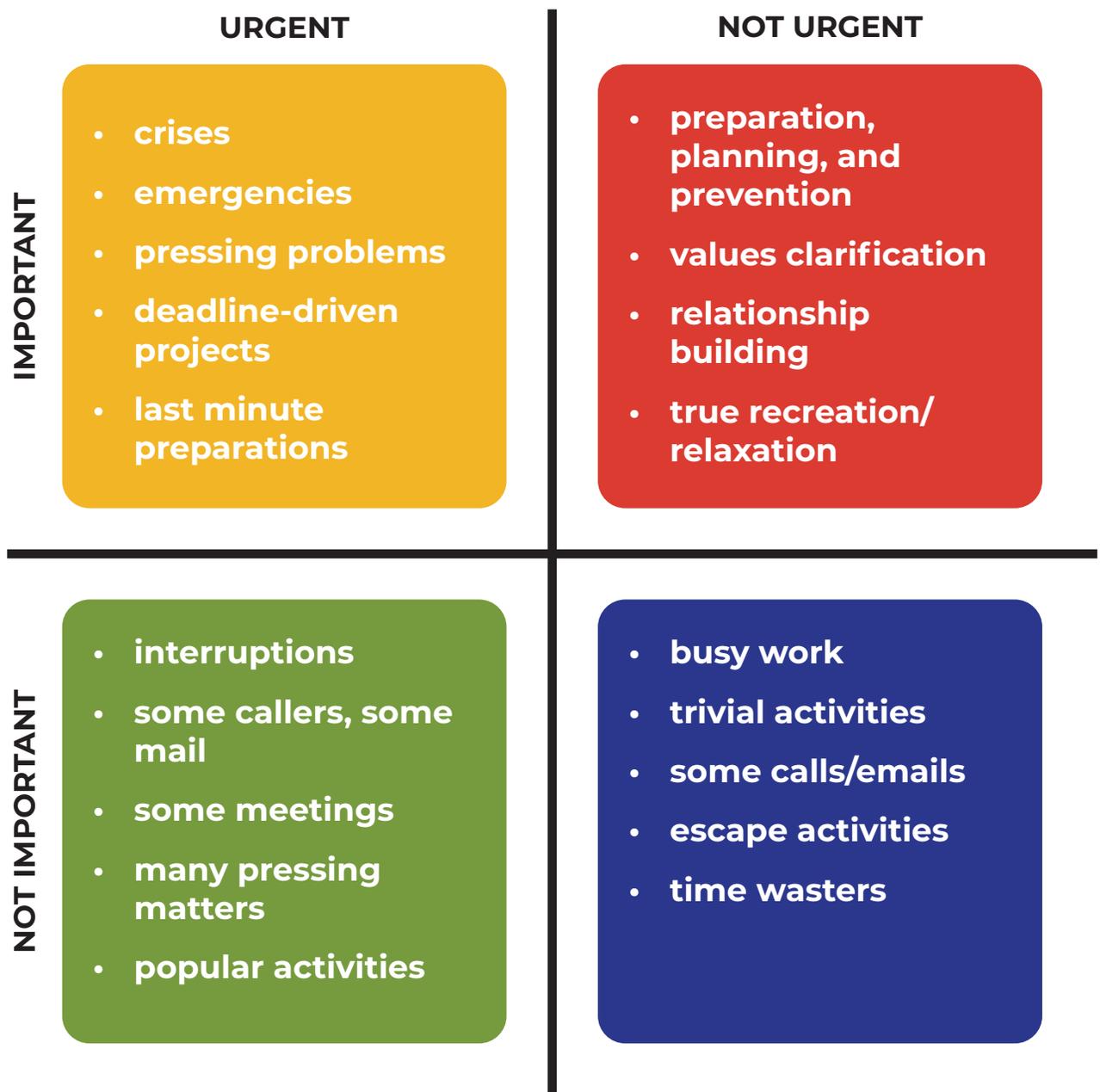
TASK MANAGEMENT TIPS

- **Prepare an annual or semester teaching calendar that specifies scope and sequence of the instructional programs.**
- **Prepare your lesson plans at least a week ahead for every class.**
If possible, plan a unit at a time to encourage continuity of your curriculum.
- **Keep the lessons for each course organized and backed up.**
Once you get through your first year of lesson plans, the following years will get easier.
- **Keep yourself and your program organized.**
Class materials very quickly can become disorganized piles or messy computer desktops. Keep class files separate for student protection.
- **Keep an up-to-date calendar.**
Note all appointments, meetings and reminders. Have access to your calendar at all times. Never say yes to a meeting or event before consulting your calendar. You have unlimited “yes’s in your day; you have unlimited “no’s.”
- **Learn to say “no.”**
Turn down requests that are not important to you or your students or are not requirements of your job.
- **Set up a system for both your curriculum and program management.**
Make sure you understand and can use it effectively and efficiently. Your curriculum files can be set up prior to developing your lessons. As you develop lessons, just drop related materials into the appropriate file.
- **Make a daily to-do list.**
Electronic programs such as [Trello](#) or [Google Keep](#) can be a great addition to your organization routine. Alternatively, paper-and-pencil lists work well too.
- **Break up larger projects into smaller chunks.**
This can help you track your progress and manage your time better.
- **Set priorities by numbering your items in order of importance or use color coding techniques.**
Remember to be realistic about how much you can accomplish in one day. Keep your list where you are able to see it clearly.
- **Be willing to accept some things are out of your control.**
Do something about the things you do have control and influence over.
- **Use your time wisely and to your advantage.**
“Waiting time” can be used to accomplish small tasks or take small chunks out of larger ones.
- **Use volunteers to accomplish appropriate tasks.**
You may be surprised the number of caretakers, parents and guardians and community members who are willing to help. Also, delegate tasks to trusted students as well.
- **Find a task management system that works for you and stick to it.**
- **Remember these truths:**
 - “Tomorrow begins with no mistakes.”
 - “Procrastination can steal your dreams.”

Adapted from: Heath-Camp, B. and Camp, W. (1992). Professional Development of Beginning Vocational Teachers: An Introduction to the Professional Development Program for Beginning Vocational Teachers (Report No. ED351568). National Center for Research in Vocational Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED351568.pdf>

TIME MANAGEMENT MATRIX

“What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important.”
— Dwight D. Eisenhower



WAYS TO CREATE A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Beginnings are important. Whether the class is large or small, it makes sense to start the semester well. Students will decide very early—often the first day—whether they will like the course, its contents, you and their fellow students. Here are some ways to create a positive learning environment.

The following checklists can help you create a positive learning environment. Not only the first day, but every day is important in retaining capable students. Even if the syllabus is printed and ready to go, you can make adjustments in teaching methods as the course unfolds and you get to know students' characteristics.

These suggestions were gathered from teachers nationwide and compiled by Joyce Povlacs at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln.

These techniques should prepare you to —

- help students make the transition from summer or holiday activities;
- direct students' attention to the immediate situation of classroom learning;
- spark intellectual curiosity—challenge students;
- encourage students' active involvement in learning;
- build a sense of community in the classroom.

HELP STUDENTS MAKE THE TRANSITION

First Day

- Start the first day of class with substantial content.
- Introduce yourself. Give a brief background on your likes and dislikes.
- Hand out an informative, attractive, user-friendly syllabus. Issue textbooks and manuals.
- Give an assignment on the first day to be collected the next class.

- Start laboratory experiments and other exercises the first time lab meets.
- Tell students how much study time the course requires.
- Hand out supplemental study aids such as how to use the library, study tips, supplemental readings, exercises.
- Put in writing a limited number of ground rules regarding absences, late work, testing procedures, grading and general decorum. Follow them.
- Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty; be clear when collaboration is wanted and when it is forbidden.

Daily

- Take attendance: roll call, clipboard sign-in, seating chart.
- Announce times when you are available to meet with students out of class.
- Show students how to handle learning in various classroom situations.
- Seek out a different student each day and get to know something about him or her.

Find out about students' jobs; if they are working, how many hours per week and what kinds of jobs.

Lab

- Call attention (written and oral) to what makes a good lab experience: completing work, following procedures, using equipment properly, cleaning up, maintaining and conserving supplies, practicing safety, using complete lab time.

WAYS TO CREATE A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

TIPS

Test Success

- Direct students to someone if help is needed with basic academic or learning skills.
- Explain how to study for the types of tests given.
- Give sample test questions and answers.

DIRECT STUDENTS' ATTENTION

- Greet students at the door when they enter the classroom.
- Start class on time.
- Give a pretest on the day's topic.
- Start the lesson with an interest approach; use a puzzle, question, paradox, picture or cartoon prepared on a slide or transparency to focus on the day's topic.
- Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning and list these on the blackboard to be answered during class.
- Have students write down what they think the important issues or key points of the day's lesson will be.

CHALLENGE STUDENTS

- Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning.
- Use a variety of presentation methods for every class meeting.
- Incorporate community resources: plays, concerts, the state fair, government agencies, businesses, the outdoors.
- Show a film in a novel way: stop it for discussion, show a few frames only, anticipate the ending, hand out a critique sheet, replay parts of it.
- Share your philosophy of teaching with students. (See Section 6, Program Development.)
- Form a student panel to present alternative views of the same concept.

- Tell about your current interests and how you got there.
- Stage a change-your-mind debate, with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during the discussion.
- Conduct role-play to make a point or to lay out issues.
- Conduct brainstorming sessions to expand students' thinking.
- Distribute a list of the unsolved problems, dilemmas or questions in agriscience, and invite students to choose one to investigate.
- Take students to hear guest speakers or special programs.

PROVIDE SUPPORT

- Use Remind, GroupMe, Google Teams or another app to communicate with students as a group.
- Check out absentees. Call, email or write a personal note.
- Hand out study questions or study guides.
- Be redundant. Students should hear, read or see key material at least three times.
- Use formative assessment to let students know how they are doing: quizzes, exercises, problem sets, oral feedback.
- Organize. Post the day's "program" on board or overhead.
- Use multiple examples in various media to illustrate key points and important concepts: videos, social media, slides, podcasts, sample material.
- Make appointments with all students who are behind or struggling (individually or in small groups).
- Hand out wallet-sized telephone cards listing important telephone numbers.

WAYS TO CREATE A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

TIPS

- Print all important course dates on a calendar and hand it out.
- Maintain an open and current lab grade book so students may check their progress.
- Direct students having problems with academic or campus matters to the appropriate offices or resources.
- Explain the grading system to students.
- Stop work at times to find out what students are thinking, feeling and doing in their lives.

ENCOURAGE ACTIVE LEARNING

- Invite students to critique each other's essays or short answers for readability and content.
- Invite students to ask questions, and wait for their response.
- Probe students' responses to questions, and wait for their response.
- Allow students to pair up to quiz each other over material for the day.
- Give students an opportunity to voice opinions about the subject matter.
- Have students apply subject matter to solve real problems.
- Place a suggestion box at the rear of the room, and encourage students to use it.
- Conduct oral show-of-hands multiple-choice tests for review. Kahoot works great, as it is anonymous to other students.
- Use task groups to accomplish specific objectives.
- Give students plenty of opportunity for practice before a major test.

- Give a test early in the semester and return it graded within the week.
- Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period.
- Give students a take-home problem relating to the day's lesson.
- Encourage students to bring current news items to class that relate to the subject matter, and post on a bulletin board. This could be used for bonus points.
- Learn every student's name.
- Set up a buddy system so students can contact each other about assignments and course work.
- Take pictures of students (snapshots in small groups, mug shots), and post in classroom, office or lab, per school guidelines.
- Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.
- Assign a team project early in the semester and provide time to assemble the team.
- Help students form study groups to operate outside the classroom.

FEEDBACK ON TEACHING

- Solicit student feedback in the first three weeks to improve teaching and learning.
- Solicit suggestions from students for outside resources and guest speakers on course topics.

Source: Povlacs Lunde, J. (n.d.). 101 Things You Can Do in the First Three Weeks of Class. Retrieved August 22, 2022, from <https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/professional-development/first-3-weeks>

CLASSROOM BASICS FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

- 1. Plan the instructional program in advance.**

Prepare your lesson with details necessary to provide students with a sturdy educational foundation. Acquire all necessary materials for execution.
- 2. Be present whenever possible.**

Unnecessary absences demonstrate poor attendance habits to students and will hinder interest and progress in your class. When you must be absent, advise your substitute early enough so you and the substitute can prepare for continued, quality student learning.
- 3. Be on time.**

Greet students at the door. Be present several minutes before class is to begin.
- 4. Be personally interested in each member of your class.**

Call students by their names. Be interested in each of your students and willingly give attention or assistance to any learning barriers that may exist.
- 5. Be attentive to the classroom environment.**

Before beginning the lesson, make necessary adjustments to the lights, ventilation, window shades, desk arrangements, whiteboard, etc.
- 6. Begin and end promptly.**

Do not wait for late comers, and do not extend the lesson beyond the time set to end the class. Your promptness will encourage your students to be prompt.
- 7. Encourage student participation and discussion.**

Utilize a variety of teaching techniques that stimulate student thinking and engagement. Remember that the one doing the talking is typically the one doing the thinking.
- 8. Mediate differences of opinion respectfully.**

Permit discussion of differences, but when they turn into arguments, move on to the next question or point of discussion.
- 9. Stay Organized.**

Keep your workspace clean, attend to daily emails and administrator requests, and keep your files and equipment organized.
- 10. Realize your serious responsibilities.**

Be as serious as possible about your teaching. Realize that what and how you teach may lead your students to fuller understanding and appreciation or discourage them from learning.
- 11. Set clear technology expectations for your students.**

Consult your school's technology guidelines to see what policies are in place and stick to them.
- 12. Develop healthy habits.**

Developing habits is not a process that happens over night. Try to develop health habits that will help you sustain energy throughout the day.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS AND TEACHING BEHAVIORS

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

- Clarity
- Variability
- Enthusiasm
- Task Oriented/Business-Like Behavior
- Opportunity to Apply Material

Rosenshine, B., & Furst, N. (1971). Research on teacher performance criteria. In B.O. Smith Ed.), Research in Teacher Education (pp. 37–72). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS

The effective agriculture teacher establishes positive, clear expectations for all students and believes that all students can learn. This is exhibited in the way they interact with students, ask questions, design learning, and talk about their teaching.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The effective teacher develops clear expectations and procedures for managing the learning environment, including managing students, space, time, and materials. An established, well-ordered environment encourages on task behavior and engagement in learning activities.

TEACHING BEHAVIORS FOR POWERFUL LEARNING

- Diagnosing student understanding in order to scaffold the learning process step-by-step.
- Creating ambitious and meaningful tasks that reflect how knowledge is used in the field.
- Drawing connections to student's prior knowledge and experiences.
- Engaging students in active learning, so that they apply and test what they know.
- Providing clear standards, constant feedback, and opportunities for work.
- Assessing student learning continuously and adapting teaching to student needs.
- Encouraging strategic and metacognitive thinking, so that students can learn to evaluate and guide their own learning.

Darling-Hammond, L. et al. (2008). Power Learning: What We Know About Teaching For Understanding. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

LESSON MASTERY

The effective teacher designs lessons which allow students to engage in the material and provides opportunities for practicing skill development which lead to student mastery of the learning objectives.

To learn more about how you can cultivate each of these elements of being an effective teacher, check out *The First Days of School: How to be an Effective Teacher* (2018) by Harry and Rosemary Wong.

BASIC CLASSROOM SUPPLIES

When you first start teaching, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the long list of classroom supplies you think you will need, however, a basic set of classroom supplies can go a long way. You can also get creative by borrowing supplies from coworkers, bringing in items from home, etc. Here is a basic list of classroom supplies that will get you started. Some of these supplies may be provided to you.

- Pens and Pencils
- Dry Erase Markers & Eraser
- Sticky Notes
- Paper
- Organizational Supplies
- Scissors
- Stapler and Staples
- Binder Clips
- Index Cards
- Tape
- Tissues
- Hand Sanitizer
- 3-Ring Binders
- 3-Hole Punch
- Highlighters
- Colored Pencils/Markers/Crayons
- A clear space to turn in assignments
- Sanitizing Wipes

FIRST WEEK “TO DO’S”

FIRST DAY “TO DO’S”

- Introduce yourself to your students.
- Build a sense of community in your classroom.
- Begin your first day with an engaging, hands-on activity, to get to know the students.

FIRST WEEK “TO DO’S”

- Have students complete a student information form.
- Discuss school policies outlined in the student handbook.
- Review course syllabus.
- Issue textbooks and/or other materials to students, if applicable.
- Review class discipline plan.
- Tour school facilities and land lab.
- Discuss expectations for notebooks and grades policy.
- Explain expectations for FFA membership and Supervised Agricultural Experience participation.
- Host an FFA community event such as a picnic or BBQ to meet the officers, members, families and advisory committee.