

The Professional Substitute Teacher

Chapter 3

Thousands of surveys, questionnaires, and interviews, show that permanent teachers, school administrators, and district personnel unanimously praise and value substitute teachers who are professional in dress, attitude, and presentation.

Being a professional substitute teacher is a full-time job. It involves many aspects of attitude and conduct. In this chapter, these aspects have been organized into the following five time frames:

1. At Home
2. Prior to Entering the Classroom
3. In the Classroom Before School
4. Throughout the Day
5. At the End of the Day



For additional information regarding the Professional Substitute Teacher, visit:

www.sti.usu.edu

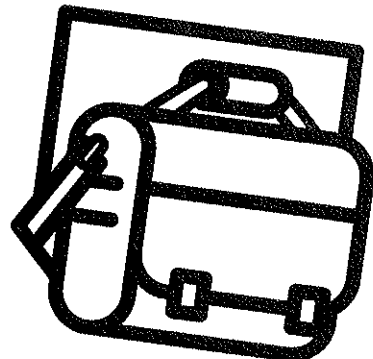


The Professional Substitute Teacher

At Home

There are a number of things you can do at home before you ever get that early morning call to substitute teach.

- Prepare a set of note cards, one for each school where you may be called to teach. On each card, list the name of the school, principal, secretary, school phone numbers, start time, address, driving directions, and the approximate time it will take to travel from your house to this location.
- Place a notebook and pencil by the phone you will be using to answer early morning calls. You may even want to note a couple of pertinent questions to ask when the call comes, such as, *“What is the name and grade level of the teacher I will be substituting for?”*
- Assemble a **SubPack** filled with teaching supplies and activity ideas for the grade levels you teach. (For more information about **SubPacks**, see page 38.)
- Designate a section of your closet for substitute teaching clothes. Assemble entire outfits, including shoes and socks, that are ironed and ready to be put on at a moment’s notice. Be sure to select comfortable shoes, since as an effective substitute teacher you will be on your feet all day. Have several different outfits ready so that you are prepared to dress appropriately for different grade levels and subject assignments.
- Research shows that teachers who dress professionally command more respect in the classroom than those who dress casually or inappropriately. Gain the respect you deserve by the way you dress.



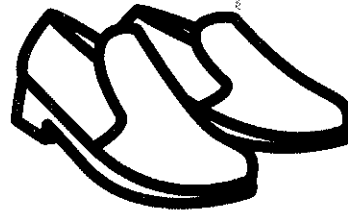


Appropriate Attire Guidelines for Men and Women

Women: Avoid uncomfortable shoes and clothing. Select outfits in which you can bend down, stoop over, and write on chalkboards with ease.

Men: Consider wearing a shirt and tie. You can always remove the tie, undo the neck button, and roll up your sleeves if you find yourself “over-dressed” for the assignment.

As a general rule, jeans, T-shirts, sandals, and other casual clothing are not considered professional or appropriate for the classroom setting. You should always dress at least as professionally as your permanent teacher counterpart.



- When the call comes, answer the phone yourself. A groggy spouse or roommate does not always make a professional impression, and you will be wasting the caller’s time while they are waiting for you to wake up and get to the phone.
- After you hang up, take a look at your note card for the school, determine how long it will take you to get there, and plan the rest of the morning accordingly. Remember that you want to be at the school at least 20 minutes prior to either the beginning of class or when students arrive. Get ready and don’t forget to grab your *SubPack* as you head out the door.



Prior to Entering the Classroom

- Arrive at the school enthusiastic about the day, while serious about your role. If possible, arrive at least 20 minutes prior to the beginning of class. Report to the principal or office to let them know you have arrived, and ask pertinent questions:

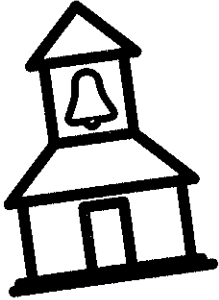
Will I be responsible for playground, lunch, or other duties?

Do any of the students have medical problems I should be aware of?

If the need arises, how do I refer a student to the office?

How do I report students who are tardy or absent?

- Obtain any keys that might be necessary.
- Find the locations of restrooms, the teachers' lounge, the cafeteria, the auditorium, the media center, and the nearest drinking fountain before school begins.
- Meet neighboring teachers.



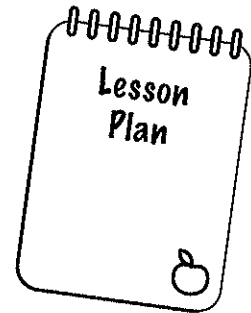
In the Classroom Before School

- Enter the classroom with confidence and your **SubPack**. Put your name on the board, then familiarize yourself with the room. Locate and review the classroom rules and evacuation map.
- Read through the lesson plans left by the permanent teacher and identify books, handouts, and papers that will be needed throughout the day. Study the classroom seating chart. If you can't find a seating chart, get ready to make your own (see page 4).
- When the bell rings, stand in the doorway and greet students as they enter the classroom. Be professional, friendly, and enthusiastic about the day. This first impression will take you a long way.

Throughout the Day

- Do your best to follow the lesson plans and carry out the assigned duties left by the permanent teacher. Over 75 percent of permanent teachers report that they spend at least 45 minutes preparing lesson plans and materials for substitute teachers. Having invested both time and energy into these plans, permanent teachers feel very strongly about having them carried out.

- On the other hand, you may enter a classroom where you are unable to locate the lesson plans or necessary materials. In such a case, act quickly, calmly, and confidently. By utilizing materials and ideas in your *SubPack*, you will still have a productive day.
- Whatever situation or challenge you are faced with, always strive to be positive and respectful. Permanent teachers care about the students in their class. They know each student's strengths and weaknesses, and want to see these handled appropriately. They expect the substitute teacher to appreciate the good in their students and bring out the best in them.
- Permanent teachers urge substitute teachers to be aware of how small things, like using a normal voice, giving praise, and having a positive attitude, can affect students. Students resent teachers who talk down to them, make promises or threats they don't intend to keep, and are not fair in administering rewards and consequences. Treating students as individuals is important. Don't blame the whole class or punish the group for the misdeeds of a few. (See chapter one for suggestions on classroom management.)
- When a substitute teacher uses good judgment, avoids criticism, and adapts to circumstances in a positive way, s/he becomes a professional role model for both the students in the class and other teachers.



At the End of the Day

Being a professional is just as important at the end of the day as it is at the beginning. What you do just before the school day ends will be the impression students take home with them. How you leave the classroom will be the first impression the permanent teacher has of you when s/he returns.



Before the Students Leave

There are several things you should do during the last few minutes of class before the students leave:

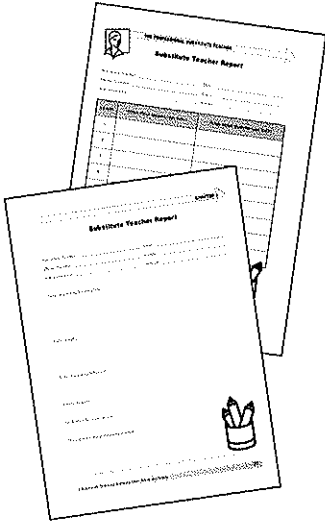
- If the teacher has classroom sets (calculators, scissors, books, etc.), make sure they are all returned before the students leave the room. It is much easier to locate a missing calculator in a class of 30 than trying to find it somewhere in the whole school.
- Challenge students to recall, and list on the board, projects and topics they have studied that day. (*Now they will have a positive answer when parents ask what they did in school, instead of the traditional, "Nothing, we had a substitute teacher."*)



- Remind students of homework. Writing homework assignments on the board throughout the day will help both you and the students remember.
- Have students straighten and cleanup the area around their desks.

After the Students Have Left

- After the students have gone, take a few minutes to complete your professional duties as a substitute teacher. Fill out a *Substitute Teacher Report* for the permanent teacher (see sample forms on the following pages). Write a detailed summary of what was accomplished throughout the day, along with any problems that arose and notes about things that went well, or students that were particularly helpful.
- If, for any reason, you were unable to carry out the plans left by the permanent teacher, make sure you explain why you were unable to carry them out and what you did instead. Leave your name, phone number, and an invitation for the permanent teacher to contact you if they have any questions, or to request you as their substitute teacher again in the future.
- Leave the teacher's desk and assignments completed by students neatly organized. Close windows, turn off lights and equipment, and double check to make sure the room is in good order before you lock the door and head for the office. At the office, return keys, hand in any money collected, express appreciation for assistance provided, and check to see if you will be needed again the next day.



In Conclusion

Teachers have high expectations of others who come into their classroom. By implementing the ideas in this chapter, you can become a professional that meets and exceeds these expectations. Always remember that you are a valued and important part of the educational system. Never diminish your role as a substitute teacher. Teachers appreciate having a person come into their classroom who is caring and capable. By being prepared, poised, and professional, you will greatly reduce the stress on the teacher, students, and yourself. The checklist on pages 77-78 will help you stay on the right track throughout the day. Additional hints and suggestions are found at the end of chapter one, on pages 32-34.

Professional Substitute Teacher Checklist



At Home

- ___ Compile a set of note cards containing pertinent information about the schools where you may be assigned.
- ___ Keep a notebook and pen by the phone you use to answer early morning phone calls.
- ___ Assemble a *SubPack*. Keep it well stocked and ready.
- ___ Organize several appropriate substitute teacher outfits in a section of your closet.
- ___ Leave early enough to arrive at school at least 20 minutes prior to the beginning of school.

Prior to Entering the Classroom

- ___ Report to the principal or the office.
- ___ Ask about student passes, playground rules, bus duty, lunch procedures, and other duties.
- ___ Ask if there are any special duties associated with the permanent teacher's assignment.
- ___ Find out how to refer a student to the office.
- ___ Review the school's discipline policy.
- ___ Ask if any children have medical problems.
- ___ Obtain necessary keys.
- ___ Ask how to report students who are tardy or absent.
- ___ Find the locations of restrooms, the teachers' lounge, and other important places in the school.
- ___ Introduce yourself to the teachers on both sides of your classroom.

In the Classroom Before School

- ___ Enter the classroom with confidence and your *SubPack*.
- ___ Put your name on the board.
- ___ Review the classroom rules.



THE PROFESSIONAL SUBSTITUTE TEACHER

- ___ Locate and review the school evacuation map.
- ___ Read through the lesson plans left by the permanent teacher.
- ___ Locate books, papers, and materials that will be needed throughout the day.
- ___ Study the seating chart. If you can't find one, be prepared to make your own.
- ___ When the bell rings, stand at the doorway and greet students as they enter the classroom.

Throughout the Day

- ___ Greet students at the door and involve them in learning activities quickly.
- ___ Carry out the lesson plans and assigned duties to the best of your ability.
- ___ Improvise using the materials in your *SubPack* to fill extra time, enhance activities, or supplement sketchy lesson plans as needed.
- ___ Be fair and carry out the rewards and consequences you establish.
- ___ Be positive and respectful in your interactions with students and school personnel.

At the End of the Day

- ___ Make sure all classroom sets are accounted for.
- ___ Challenge students to recall projects and topics they have studied that day.
- ___ Remind students of homework.
- ___ Have students straighten and clean the area around their desks.
- ___ Complete a *Substitute Teacher Report* for the permanent teacher.
- ___ Neatly organize papers turned in by students.
- ___ Close windows, turn off lights and equipment, and make sure the room is in good order before you lock the door.
- ___ Turn in keys and any money collected at the office.
- ___ Thank individuals who provided assistance during the day.
- ___ Check to see if you will be needed again the next day.

Getting a Permanent Job!

Many substitute teachers are working toward the goal of getting a permanent teaching assignment and classroom of their own. If you are such a substitute, below are some suggestions that might help.

- **Be Proactive**

Meet with principals and district personnel early in the year to let them know that you are excited about working in the district and hope, at some point, to be offered a permanent teaching position. Let your intentions be known.

- **Be Available**

Districts are looking for people on whom they can depend. Once you have signed up to substitute, try to be available to teach whenever you are needed. Your willingness to fill in at the “last minute” will make a lasting, favorable impression on those making personnel decisions later in the year.

- **Be Professional**

You are a teacher in the school district. You should act, dress, and speak appropriately. Arrive early and stay late. Volunteer to help with after school activities. If your intentions to become a permanent teacher are known, you will be evaluated for this position in everything you do and say throughout the school year.

- **Avoid Criticism**

Anything negative you say about a school, principal, or teacher will eventually come back to haunt you. Stay positive and compliment those around you whenever possible. If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.

- **Be Confident**

Walk tall, teach with confidence, but don't be overbearing.

- **Evaluations**

When appropriate, ask for positive evaluation forms or letters of support/recognition to be filed at the district office. Many times only negative evaluations are filled out and sent in.



- **Learn From Experience**

Don't assume that one bad experience or evaluation will take you out of the running. Learn from the experience and ask for advice from other teachers or principals.

- **Grow Professionally**

Attend workshops sponsored by the district. Some districts even invite substitute teachers to attend professional development workshops scheduled for permanent teachers. You may also consider subscribing to current education journals or magazines. This illustrates that you are serious about a career in education and want to stay current with what is happening in the profession. Check with media center personnel for subscription information.

- **Get To Know The District**

One of the most commonly used phrases in prospective teacher interviews is, "Are you familiar with . . ." By illustrating your knowledge of special programs, textbooks, or the mission statement of a district, you show that you are interested and up-to-date with what is going on in the district. Applicants who are familiar with district programs and practices have a better chance at getting a job.