

Top 10 Tips for Beginners

By Tina Hicks Whitten



One of my favorite things about being a veteran teacher is watching brand spanking new, right out of college, first-year teachers beginning their careers. These young 'uns are so full of energy, enthusiasm, hope, determination, and "save the world" attitudes that I find them extremely refreshing.

I have mentored many of these talented people and found that, although they are well prepared in content areas and child development research, they didn't learn everything they needed to know in college.

Therefore, let me take this opportunity to offer some advice about what I have learned from 10 years in my classroom. Here we go...

1. Take your vitamin C.

You will find during your first years that you are sick all of the time. You may even begin to believe that you are allergic to

your students. In my first year of teaching I had a conversation with the doctor that went something like this.

Doctor: "It seems you have conjunctivitis (pink eye) in both eyes, again."

Me: "That makes the third time in six months."

Doctor: "Where did you say you work?"

Me (proudly): "I'm a teacher!"

Doctor: "Oh, honey, get used to this then. You'll be sick for the first four years of your career."

This brought a completely new meaning to the phrase "sick of my job."



2. Stock up on antibacterial waterless hand soap and disinfectant sprays.

When I am helping children with something, I tend to pick up their pencils and write on their paper. Bad habit, right? God knows where a pencil has been. It is slim enough and long enough to reach the depths of one's nostril and pull out the most interesting things. I always realize this after the pencil is already in my hand. That is why antibacterial waterless hand soap is my friend. I also love to disinfect the classroom. I make my students clean their desks daily. You would be surprised at all the little germs that enjoy living on those desktops among the leftovers from juice spills, snacks, and sneezes. For proof of this, see tip number one.

3. Remember, children are brutally honest.

It no longer hurts my feelings when students tell me that my pink lipstick doesn't match my red shirt or that I am having a bad hair day. I just remember—they truly believe they are doing me a favor by announcing this in front of the class.

4. Keep a journal of the funny things your students say.

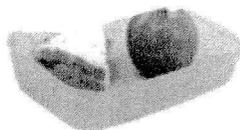
I was teaching a group of students one afternoon and needed to write with a blue marker on chart paper. As I was writing, the marker ran out of ink. I put the cap on the marker and tossed it to my team teacher. Without a word, she caught it and threw me another. One boy said, "Miss Hicks—Y'all got that ESPN don't cha?"

5. Invest in good, comfortable shoes.

Don't try to be cute or fashionable. The blisters and corns on your feet aren't worth it.

6. Practice not going to the bathroom for hours at a time.

I get to school at 7:15 a.m. and my first opportunity to pee is at 12:30 p.m. After five hours and 15 minutes, I am praying that the staff bathroom down the hall is available. Bladder control should definitely be taught in college.



7. Practice eating your lunch in three minutes or less.

By the time you help two children find their lunch money, convince five of them that pork dippers really taste like chicken, put 18 pointed straws in juice boxes, and stop two food fights, three minutes is all you will get.

8. Have a stash of chocolate in your desk—you'll need it some days.

Enough said.

9. Don't snap your fingers at other people's children in the grocery store.

I know it's hard—especially when they are climbing on the shelves and racing their carts down the aisle. It's not your classroom.

10. Try not to treat your significant other as though he or she is in third grade.

This suggestion comes from my husband. During a heated "discussion" we were having, I didn't believe he was paying attention to what I was saying. So I asked him to put on his listening ears. Needless to say, this didn't help the disagreement a bit.

There they are! The top 10 tips you never learned in college. Keep them in mind all year.

This article originally appeared in the September 2003 issue of NEA Today magazine. At that time, Tina Hicks Whitten taught third grade at the New Vision School of Math, Science, and Technology in Madison, North Carolina.

Top photo by Jerry Wolford

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KC | 2009/08/18

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"Like Brooklyn I appreciate the laugh to calm my nerves! I am a first year teacher as well. It's nice to know there are so many teachers out there who want to help us "newbies.""

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