50 Things To Do  
The First Week Back To School

“Every journey begins with a simple thought.”  
– anonymous

A new school year or semester on the horizon can be overwhelming. So much to do, so little time! However, don't fret. Most can be done during the first crucial week in class - a time when experience teachers gracefully assess the needs of their students, create a wonderful class atmosphere and set the stage for the learning time to come.

Here are my recommended things to do the first week or two back. Many have a link taking you to a resource or further reading. Browse at your leisure.

1. **Make A Seating Plan.** First things first. Where will your students sit? How will the seating be set up in the class? Horseshoe, rows, groups? Design a plan and fill out where each student sits with their name and photo (if possible). Use this constantly as a reference the first week or two so you’ll remember their names. Don’t forget to use students names when you can – it is proven to help students learn!  

2. **Get Personal.** Prepare a presentation or bring in photos of yourself. Have students ask you questions about the photos. Get students to bring in their own photos the next day so they can answer questions about their lives and introduce themselves.  

3. **Be prepared!** There are so many things to do the first few weeks of the school semester. How can you manage them all? How to keep track? Simple – make a checklist and keep track of all the things you need to do / get done.  

4. **Decorate.** Your classroom is your castle and there is so much you can do in the class. Get your students helping with ideas and decoration – it is their classroom too!  

5. **Go over all safety concerns.** Teachers have the serious and ultimate responsibility for student safety. Make sure to review all the exit and firse procedures and go over all
school rules about safety (allergies, school travel, bullying high among them). Look over your classroom and make sure it is student safe!

6. **Negotiate Class rules.** **Don’t do this the first day!** Use that for getting to know students and building class spirit. Second day, sit down students and brainstorm rules for both the teacher and the students. They’ll definitely be creative! Put them on chart paper and have everyone sign them. Also make sure to clearly note the consequences for breaking the rules. **Here’s what one teacher did**

7. **Break The Ice.** It is an art trying to get students to loosen up and relax. You can reduce their affective filter by using some strong icebreaking activities or warmers. I love the 2 truths, 1 lie game. But find what works for you and your students. **Get More.**

8. **Do An Informal Needs Survey.** Get to know your students. The first few weeks is the time to assess what you have to change to the curriculum and how you can personalize your long range plans. **Read more. What is a needs survey?**

9. **Prepare “extra” work.** Some students will inevitably finish their tasks early. You’ll have to be prepared with extra work or duties for these students. Photocopy booklets they can use to do extra work/study. Prepare extra activities they might do. Language acquisition takes more time than is available in class. Think about using an EnglishCentral teacher trial to assign video lessons for speaking/study and which you can quickly track and see if students have met their “extra” goals. **Find out more ….**

10. **Take some “Me” time off.** Yes, from week 1 start to look after yourself and keep your teaching batteries sparking. Teachers need continual downtime and relaxation. Schedule exercise, reading, time out just for yourself. **Read More ….**

11. **Find out how much $ you have to spend.** You shouldn’t have to spend money from your own pocket on school things. Many teachers do but most often it is because they didn’t ask about this and budget with the school. Find out from the start and prepare accordingly.

12. **Start reflecting. Keep a journal.** Reflective teaching will help you develop as a teacher. You don’t have to be Shakespeare either! Just jot down during the week, the things that you feel concerned about or wish to think more about. Plan some action research around some questions you may have. It will be great at the end of the school
year to re-read your notes/journal and see how far you’ve come. Make the invisible (learning), visible…. Read more.

13. **Start building a class library.** Possible as a language teacher, the most important thing you will do for your students. Bring in your own books, magazines, comics etc… and have students also bring in their own to share (but have them clearly put their name in each book and track them). Also get your students making their own mini books to share and read in class. Use the library for DEAR time (Drop Everything And Read) and for other activities like “Quiet time”. Read more.

14. **Set your classroom management strategy.** How will you discipline students? What signals will you use during class? How will you transition between activities? How will you keep students motivated? So many questions in this regard and you should have an overall general strategy in this regard. Tip: the more you can get students responsible for managing themselves, the better off your life will be! Read more.

15. **Rubric It.** Formative (ongoing) assessment is so important and you’ll find that a basic rubric which you can use to simply/clearly explain the goals and assessment of activities – invaluable. Fill it in yourself or with students. If possible in the first language. Students will then clearly know your expectations and what they have to do to gain a good mark. Learn More.

16. **Get social media friendly.** Today’s students are for the most part, very social media savvy. This means you the teacher should use this to your advantage. Use one platform: twitter, facebook, tumblr and set up how you’ll all connect there. Through a hashtag (#class2013), list or private group. Keep your students updated and motivated there! Read More.

17. **Label It.** A fun activity that will give students ownership of the class. Cut up strips of paper and provide tape. In groups, students are assigned a part of the class and must label all the important things in the class! They’ll learn a lot of English, guaranteed. See This

18. **Reach out to all stakeholders.** There are more than students in your classroom. There are also parents, guardians, family members, administrators, special educators, previous teachers, siblings in the class as surrogates. First week, it pays off big time to
pick up the phone and introduce yourself as the teacher. If you don’t speak the parents’ language, use a translator or send a letter home in that language.

19. **Set some actionable PD goals.** The year will go by fast. Think about one or two things you’d like to improve on this year and reflect on your progress on them every few weeks. Pause more, use the whole classroom, speak slower, error correct less etc……. Be specific about your goals, don’t make them overly general. *Join a professional development group* and ask your peers for some help/advice.

20. **Make A Class Calendar.** Use some chart paper and assign each group or pair of students a month of the year. Have them design a calendar page listing the important dates for the class, for the year (that you brainstormed together). Also list student birthdays! Display for all to see.

21. **Prepare for your absence.** No matter how much you think of yourself as “Super Teacher”, you are bound to miss a few days of class time. Prepare a binder of simple lesson plans, printables and handouts that will help any supply or substitute teacher seamlessly teach your class. Include safety procedures, class lists and special concerns. *Read more …*

22. **Create an online homebase.** Online communication with students is a must. It will allow students who are away for an extended time to keep up with the class. It will allow you to contact students when not at school. Also an invaluable place for informal learning, sharing of student work etc…… *Edmodo* is a tried and tested place but a wiki or *google sites* will do as well. *Livebinders* is also a popular but limited option. *Try This Out.*

23. **Have An Exit Strategy.** Also an entrance strategy. How will your students enter or exit the classroom. What is expected to happen. Don’t leave it to be a free for all or you are asking for trouble. Many ways but the easiest is to dismiss students by groups so there isn’t a big rush. Also students should know what to do when they come into the class, without you being there. Set this up for success.

24. **Do A Toolkit Inventory.** With experience, a teacher builds a strong toolkit. Ideas, handouts, websites, instant lessons that are in their backpocket. Think of what your own are and keep them in a handy place. Start adding to them either mentally or by filing them away as you gather them. *See more.*
25. **Meet the school VIPs.** The first week or so is the time to introduce yourself to the important people where you work. By this, I don’t mean the Principal or DOS or anyone in administration. Meet the janitor, meet the school secretary, meet the librarian – they’ll be invaluable assets and friends during your school year. Treat them well!

26. **Decorate Your Door.** Your classroom door is the first impression others will have about your class and classroom. Also the first impression your students will have. Think of how it might be inspiring and set the stage for what will happen within. [Here’s a great example.](#)

27. **Re-engineer your classroom.** Don’t just accept what is there – IT IS YOUR CLASSROOM. Look at your classroom objectively and decide how you can re-organize it to support your teaching style and delivery. Think about where you will sit (back or front), where the quiet area is, how you can keep the temperature stable. What about noise levels? Quick exiting, safety concerns?

28. **Prepare a picture library.** All teachers from day 1 should start building a picture library. The most important part of a language teacher’s toolkit. One made of clipped newspaper/magazine images that are highly contextual and can be used for all sorts of activities in the classroom ([here are some suggestions](#)). Another that is digital and can be presented visually in the classroom to prompt language. Can’t highlight the need for this one more – thus, the list starts with it! [More here](#)

29. **Get Form Fit.** What are the forms you need throughout the year? Keep them in a handy place. If you don’t have any, ask how you can get them and who has them. Or if needed, just make your own. Examples: parental consent, homework list, sign up sheets, book order forms, project sign up list etc ……..

30. **Have Great Expectations.** Teachers that believe each and every student in their class is a genius and intelligent, will have incredible success. This is key and research supported. Set your expectations for students and clearly communicate this to them. [Read about expectancy effects](#)
31. **Picture It.** Taking photos is something vital to a successful school year. Appoint a class photographer and keep your photos in an accessible place. Use as part of your lessons and for building/maintaining class spirit. Make sure you have a class camera or video recorder and use it to great effect! [View an example.]

32. **Have Some “Go To” Games.** Games are something students of any age enjoy. Also the perfect way to review the week’s learning in a fun, informal way. Games are also handy for filling in extra time, especially board/discussion games! [Read more …]

33. **Be Tech Tight.** Get to know what technology is available at your school and who the “tech” guy/gal is. Make sure all your equipment is in working order and you have all the hardware/software to succeed. If there are problems, get this in order early in the school year! If necessary, do a technology survey of the school / staff. [See one here….]

34. **Think “open” and “outside”**. Schools and classrooms no longer have 4 walls. They should be open and take your students into the outside world. Prepare guest visitors either in person or through Skype. Plan your field trips and excursions the first few weeks, asking students what they are interested in doing and why. Early birds will get to take the trips! [Get inspired…. Read more…..]

35. **Build Classroom Spirit.** Team building just doesn’t happen by chance. It will take your own concerted effort. The first few weeks, prepare activities that get students working as a team and becoming a tight unit. [Read more …]

36. **Use A Student Information Sheet.** No matter what info. you already have, provide each student with a form that they can fill in and submit to you. Short but sweet. Keep these handy with a photo attached if possible. You’ll learn lots about your students this way and it will come in handy for all sorts of reasons! [………]

37. **Become a “Whole Classroom” teacher.** One thing I’ve found that less experienced and ineffective teachers do is remain glued to the front “hot spot” of the class. Start week 1 walking around the classroom and speaking from all parts. Set up a second desk at the back of the class and use that one where appropriate. It will help your teaching immensely and all students will benefit. [Read more…..]

38. **Prepare for special occassions.** You’ll need some awards, some special prizes and snacks to reward students who do wonderful things. I’ve in the past bought medals (you
can get them cheap) to hand out to students when warranted. **Warning – keep these in a safe place, students will find them!**

39. **“Class”ify.** Grouping students is an art and you should change student grouping often. Too often our students end up working and knowing a few students in their classroom and that is a pity. Think deeply about your seating and grouping plans. How much student autonomy should you give? Female/male mixing? How large of groups? How will be the group leaders?

40. **Review, Recycle and Review.** Decide how you will review material that is studied. Too many teachers don’t think this through and review, recycling is essential for students to acquire and learn language. Set a weekly time to go over the week’s learning. [Read more ...]

41. **Use An Agenda.** Students like organization and an agenda on the board, however flexible will help both you and students use time effectively in class. Designate one part of the board for a 1,2,3,4 agenda and cross the items off as you go along. It will lend to a sense of achievement for the whole class. – [Read more.]

42. **Differentiate.** We don’t teach a subject, we teach students. Each student is different and at their own place/state/level. Decide your own strategy of how you will differentiate the curriculum and allow each student to proceed at their own level and rate. A student learning plan for each student is a good place to start. [Read more ....]

43. **Prepare To Step Aside.** The first week or so of class, you’ll be dominating the scene. But after students catch their breathe, it is time to let them take some control and “be the teacher”. Students can effectively help and teach each other and teachers should be prepared to step aside and allow students to control more and more of what goes on in the classroom as the year goes along. [Read more....]

44 **Shared Responsibilities.** Students should be doing a lot of the work in the classroom, don’t do it yourself! Cleaning the board, pushing in chairs, sweeping up, getting supplies and more. Assign duties on the board or a chart and change regularly. [Read more]

45. **Build Your PLN.** You’ll need support to grow and develop as an ELT professional. Make friends at conferences, use twitter (#eltchat) and social media websites to meet fellow teachers struggling with the same concerns as you. Read some great ELT blogs and build your own personal learning network. [Read more.]
46. **Stay Healthy.** — besides having some aspirin handy in your desk, make sure you and your students get exercise and stay mentally fit. Learn to take a break and just do some stretching and relaxing. This is important and too often teachers just keep pushing ahead when everyone is brain bewildered and nothing is going in/on.

47. **Get Students Introducing Themselves.** Provide students the opportunity to introduce themselves using both traditional means (making a word poem, writing, conversation) and through online profiles or tools. Voicethread is a great tool for putting up a photo and having students go there to record a few words about themselves. [View This …](view_this)

48. **Make Friends.** Find someone in the school that you get along with. Share lunch, share a laugh and if possible, share classrooms from time to time. Teaching can truly be so, so lonely. It is necessary for you to take the first step and make friends on staff – at least one.

49. **Down Time.** Use image capture technology to good effect. It is a great tool. Teachers can capture images of a video and then present the images for retelling. Most operating systems come included with a screen capture tool. I prefer to use SnagIt but also Jing has a free one. [View It.](view_it)

50. **Quiet Time.** Classrooms and especially language classrooms are by nature busy and loud. That’s great. However, most people need some quiet time during the day or at one time or another. Prepare and schedule some quiet time to step back so you can jump ahead further!

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