

How to Work Smarter, Not Harder as a Teacher: 25 Actions to Start Now

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1. Leave Bulletin Boards “Bare” at Start of School Year.

THE HARD WAY: You stress over your bulletin boards.

THE SMART WAY: You can have nice bulletin boards without all the fuss. Simply cover all of them with butcher paper and a simple border.

That’s it!

If you must have something to show, a welcome banner does the job as do simple classroom job helper cards.

2. Let Go of Perfection.

THE HARD WAY: Your bulletin boards have to be absolutely perfect, and everything in your room has to be labeled...with a label maker. Folders must be color-coded.

THE SMART WAY: If you don’t have the time nor energy, prioritize.

Label by hand. Don’t get crazy with all the different color codes.

Less is oftentimes more.

Yes, you want your room to be functional and pleasing to the eye, but that doesn’t mean it has to be magazine-shoot worthy.

3. Seek Self-Validation.

THE HARD WAY: Sometimes we do all the extra stuff because we want validation from others.

Kind comments are nice, but are you really doing it for you and your students or for others?

THE SMART WAY: Your basic, neat classroom is enough.

So what if you don’t get any comments about how nice your room looks?

Your simple room is enough, your best teaching is enough, you’re enough.

4. Assign Each Student a Classroom Helper Job.

THE HARD WAY: You do all the work. Everything.

THE SMART WAY: Work smarter, not harder by giving every [student a classroom helper job](#).

5. Establish Routines & Systems.

THE HARD WAY: Changing routines too much confuses students and contributes to poor classroom management. Plus, you never get into a set routine yourself.

THE SMART WAY: Have set routines for students to follow throughout the school day: morning arrival, transitions, walking from/to class, etc.

Keep these routines consistent, and to better help students, place a list of the most common procedures in a prominent area as a reminder.

6. Give Less Homework.

THE HARD WAY: You give lots of homework regularly, and it's getting hard to keep up with it all.

THE SMART WAY: Give homework as needed. Don't create more work for yourself.

Having students read nightly (and complete a reading log) is perfectly fine.

7. Regularly Put Into Practice a Student-Centered Classroom.

THE HARD WAY: Maybe you dominate book discussions, "over help" students, and/or don't give them enough time to analyze information.

THE SMART WAY: Remember, you are the facilitator.

Make students the center of it all; they should be doing most of the work, not you.

8. Utilize Student Grade Sheets.

THE HARD WAY: Keep students in the dark about their grades and academic progress until progress report time.

THE SMART WAY: If you teach 4th or 5th grade, consider using a simple grade sheet with students if your school uses the traditional grading system of a, b, c, d, f.

These [simple grades sheets](#) are usually a hit with kids and parents!

9. Don't Formally Grade Everything.

THE HARD WAY: You have tons of papers to grade.

THE SMART WAY: For quick assessing, use a stamp system. A green stamp stands for "great job".

Yellow is "review - you have a few errors".

Red means "What?! Please redo."

10. Delegate.

THE HARD WAY: You attempt to do everything yourself.

THE SMART WAY: Delegate various tasks.

If you have an assistant, have her work with a small group, organize files, make copies, etc.

Parent volunteers are a great resource. Room parents are able to organize parties, field trips, help with making copies, etc.

11. Don't Reinvent the Wheel.

THE HARD WAY: Creating every lesson from scratch is time-consuming and definitely not practical.

THE SMART WAY: When it comes to lessons and activities, don't reinvent the wheel.

Switch things up but always start with what's available.

Take a standard lesson, and make it your own. Make it more engaging, more hands-on, more interactive, or add a technology thread to it.

12. Organize Files + Declutter Digitally.

THE HARD WAY: You store files randomly or without a strategy.

THE SMART WAY: Maintain one of those crates that hold hanging folders.

Have a folder for each child and a folder for any topics that you teach. When students bring a doctor's note or return signed assignment papers, they file them in their respective folder.

On the teacher's end, once you've taught a lesson, put the template sheets used for that lesson in its appropriate topic folder.

Additionally, delete emails and digital files clearly not worth saving and file everything else.

13. Collaborate With Your Grade Level Team.

THE HARD WAY: You plan solo.

THE SMART WAY: Plan with your team, if you have a good one.

Each team member plans for a different subject, and then you swap plans. Tweak to make them your own or use as is.

14. Change Your Mindset and Say No.

THE HARD WAY: You think participating in every single school activity or going over-and-beyond is the way to get into your administrators' good graces.

THE SMART WAY: Change your mindset.

You don't have to stay at school the latest or arrive the earliest. And you don't need to volunteer for every committee.

Yes, you want to have some level of involvement, but it's okay to decline sometimes.

15. Cap Your To-Do List.

THE HARD WAY: You cram every little task possible within your 24-hour day.

THE SMART WAY: Set a specific number of items to do each day and call it a day after you accomplish them.

Your to-do list will never be empty. So set your daily goals, and once you reach them, done!

16. Make Efficient Use of Technology.

THE HARD WAY: Do you use technology simply for the sake of using technology?

Does it really maximize the learning of the targeted academic objectives?

THE SMART WAY: If technology use is creating more stress and problems for you and your students, just stick to what technology you know.

And if the use of a certain app or device is required, seek the assistance of the Technology Coordinator.

17. Focus on Your Strengths, Not Weaknesses.

THE HARD WAY: You try to do things you're simply not good at (even when your skill-set demonstrates otherwise). You don't make the effort to improve on your weaknesses.

THE SMART WAY: Know your strengths and weaknesses.

Play up your strengths, and work on improving your weaknesses.

18. Pass on the Expensive Classroom Decor – Use Recycled Materials.

Save yourself money and headache by reducing the amount of expensive, cutesy stuff used in the classroom.

Instead, use recycled materials to create a warm, inviting classroom.

19. Don't Put All Your Eggs Into One Basket.

Obtain multiple certifications to make yourself more marketable, and be open to relocating if the job market shows no love for your certification area.

20. Work in Independent Schools.

Need a different teaching environment or a different type of professional challenge?

If you want to stretch yourself professionally, take a look at [independent schools](#) in your state.

21. Choose a Grade Level that Works for You.

When it comes to your teaching career, one of the most important decisions is the grade level you choose to teach.

How you feel about a certain grade level will play a huge role in how well you respond to that age group and the teaching team.

22. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.

Grab a copy of the book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff, and It's All Small Stuff* by Richard Carlson.

It's great to refer to whenever you need guidance and wisdom.

23. Take Care of Yourself.

Take care of yourself.

Get moving, eat clean, and spend time with those you love.

You'll do better at your job as a result because once you take care of yourself, you're in a better position to help others.

24. Set Boundaries.

Set clear boundaries for work and home.

Disconnect from work-related stuff once you arrive home, and don't respond (or even check for) work emails or engage in any work-related tasks after a certain hour.

25. Advocate for Yourself.

Last but not least, when things don't go your way at work or when something goes down because inevitably it will, speak up for yourself.

Don't be afraid to say how you feel.

Hoarding feelings is never a good thing, and if you don't say anything, others will assume everything's okay.