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# 10 Time-Saving Teaching Hacks

## To help you effectively manage your time

Time constraints are a feature of most people's day-to-day lives, whether that be on a personal or professional level. We can all benefit from more effectively managing our time, none more so than educators. Teaching presents its own unique set of competing duties and responsibilities, all expected to be carried out in a timely fashion. For example, in a 2013 survey by Top Notch Teaching, 30% of respondents believed managing time was one of their three biggest concerns as a teacher. Therefore it is vital for the contemporary teacher to 'work smart' and utilise time saving strategies.

The average teacher in UK schools typically works more than fifty hours per week, yet spends only half of that time teaching in the classroom. Consequently, there is room for application of time management principles to structured work time (classroom teaching), unstructured work time (planning/free periods), and personal time.

We have compiled a list of our top ten favourite teaching hacks. These resources will help you keep on top of daily tasks, maintain your work-life balance and avoid you feeling like you're living in the classroom.

### 1. Organise, organise, organise

One of the key ideas of time management is to ensure that everything in your life is organised as much and as best as possible. This includes everything from your week and timetable, to your classroom and home life. Always try and find the most structured and efficient means of doing tasks. When it comes to arranging your classroom, you need to look at the most logical and useful arrangement of items. Ideally you want to have your entire classroom organised or labeled. This is crucial if you want to have a classroom that runs on its own with minimal day-to-day upkeep. By having everything organised neatly, you will find you have a lot more time to spend on teaching.

### 2. Break your days and weeks into chunks of time

On any given day you have certain tasks to complete and things to do within respective timeframes. If we look at the various tasks across a day, time-blocking can be the difference between you completing every task on time, or having to spend precious personal time catching up with yourself. If you break down your day into smaller chunks, allocate set times to certain tasks, and stick to these plans, you will find that you're working a lot more efficiently than if you simply try to get everything done as and when you come to it. Do not pick up a job, do a bit of it, then start on something else. Once you have a clear idea of how much time each task is being allocated you can move steadily through each one, ticking them off as you go. This will focus your attention and output to one task at a time, and ensure that you don't spend too much time on certain tasks and end up rushing others.

### 3. Set aside 1-2 days per week to stay a little later

One 'solution' to time management for teachers is to take work home in the evening or work late. This is

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understandable because it takes some of the pressure off the day. In teaching, this has been part of the culture for a while, however it can get out of control if you let it. If you stay behind as and when something comes up, inevitably you will end up spending more hours achieving the same results than if you set specific days each week as your 'late' days. This again comes down to efficiency and organisation. When you know the timeframes to complete tasks by, you are more likely to remain focused on the goal and complete it promptly without distractions. To quote a teacher directly; "After school, I can get everything done in 1-2 hours, but at home it will inevitably take 5!"

## 4. Maximise Lesson Planning

Forget planning a lesson, you need to plan your lesson planning. This means that you don't just look at how to plan for an individual class, but lessons as a whole. To give a practical example; if you teach five lessons a day and you have one hour to plan them all, you'd need to be able to plan a lesson in twelve minutes. However, it's unlikely it will work out as specifically as that. If we look at Pareto's Law (80/20 rule), about 80% of the lessons you plan will be your mainstay or 'bread & butter' lesson structure, which you should be able to zoom through in 20% of your time. Whereas the other, more one-off, lessons will require significantly more time.

When it comes to the actual planning of an individual lesson, there are a number of tips and tools that can help. Some teachers keep a lesson planning notebook that includes all plans, activities, and standards. This notebook is a great tool to keep things organised and to help you stay on task. Use worthwhile resources that can be repeated, and generate tasks that are easily reused, saved, and kept for next year. Resource sharing is also a no-brainer. Be open to sharing lesson plans and resources with other teachers in your department. There are also numerous forums and social network groups for teachers that are stacked full of lesson ideas and inspiration.

## 5. Multitask when students are doing independent work

Depending on the age of your students, while they are working independently, you might be able to make use of the time to tackle any extra tasks that have popped up, or put some time into a task that will leave you having more time free later. Many teachers use this rare quiet period to do tasks like grading, although if you have a shorter period of time on your hands something like dealing with emails might be more appropriate.

## 6. Utilise technology

Selected carefully and used correctly, technology really can make your life easier, and these days there are a multitude of tech options to save teachers' time. Some teachers harness the power of lesson planning sites to save time. Online homework planners are invaluable in minimising the time lost on excuses. Online seating planners also take the hassle out of the job and create an optimised learning environment.

As mentioned above, there are also numerous forums, apps, and social network groups for teachers to share best practice, offer advice, and share resources, which can all prove incredibly useful to the modern teacher.

## 7. Keep a clean desk

Not all solutions come from technology. Two-thirds of us spend at least half an hour each week looking for lost items not on our computers, but buried in the pile of papers you've let mount up on your desk. Letting things pile up on your

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desk is a sure fire way to lose things. Here are a few tips to clear the clutter from your (physical) desktop.

- Use an inbox/outbox system for items that arrive on your desk daily.
- Use well-labeled shelves for regular submissions such as a tray for turning in homework assignments
- Teach your students how to use the system, and you'll spend a lot less time sorting through stacks of papers.
- When something comes in, put it in its place right away. Don't let things pile up.
- Store away anything you don't regularly use but may need again in the future.

## 8. Don't procrastinate

Do it now! Edward Young said that "Procrastination is the thief of time" and it truly is a huge time waster. The most significant change in behaviour that you can make is a commitment to take action immediately and not waste time procrastinating or doing things you 'like doing' but are a lower priority than what you 'should' be doing. For example a lot of time is wasted reading emails, intending to reply but then going on to something else. Inevitably we re-read emails and other correspondence a number of times before finally taking action. Establish a new habit of checking your email only at certain times in the day, when it is sensible (for instance lunch time or while your students are doing independent work). It's also highly recommended to turn off the pop-up or noise which notifies you that you have mail. For many people this the single biggest obstacle to successful time management.

## 9. Learn to say no

Teaching attracts a certain kind of person. By their very nature, teachers like to go out of their way to help others and especially help their students succeed. However this can lead to saying 'yes' too often. Teachers can frequently volunteer for too many committees, take on too many projects, or help colleagues to the point where it impacts themselves negatively. It's important to keep in mind that if you attempt to do too much, you risk, at best, not completing tasks to your standards, or at worst, burnout. Everybody has their limits, and sometimes you just have to say no.

## 10. Don't neglect the really important things in life

Finally, make sure you don't neglect the important things in life. Allocating time for important things is vital; and by that we mean relaxation, exercise, and socialising with friends, as well as sleep, food and family time. This is not recommending a hedonistic lifestyle; it is ensuring that the basic ingredients of life do not get forgotten in a frenzy of work. If they are planned, if they appear on your 'timetable', they are much less likely to get pushed to one side. Balance is everything.