

Focusing on the Classroom: A Checklist for Teachers

What does a music teacher do? They teach classes, share their love of music with students, prepare lesson plans, develop curriculum, assess and evaluate students' progress, and share this information with parents, fellow teachers and school administrators.

The following are some ideas to help you become the best professional music educator you can, as well as realize the full potential in each of your students.

Noteworthy Concepts to Keep in Mind as You Start Your Career:

- **Be genuine.** Students can spot insincerity.
- **Be enthusiastic.** Enthusiasm is contagious and will help prevent discipline problems. Students will enjoy your class and remain on task if they are engaged and enjoy what they are doing. You need to get the students on your side. If they see that **YOU** are sold on your product—music education—[it is infectious] they will be inspired by your passion.
- **Keep things moving!** Plan a well-paced lesson with lots of variety.
- **Be fair to all students.** Be very careful that you do not choose “favorites.” This takes constant vigilance because you naturally like some students better than others. Look for a good quality in each student and capitalize on it.
- **Take an interest in what the students are doing outside of your classroom.** The students will respond to you even more if they know you are genuinely interested in them.
- **Be professional.** Value the time of your students, parents, colleagues and administrators. Have high expectations of yourself and maintain consistency in all that you do.
- **Communicate clearly and often.** State procedures and expectations in writing and share them with students, parents and staff as early in the year as possible. Provide reminders regularly and follow up individual concerns with a phone call.
- **Praise in public, discipline in private.** Avoid confrontations with students in front of the class. Students will do anything to save face in front of their peers, and confrontations denigrate teacher authority. Above all, never “lose it” in front of your class.
- **Ask for help.** The best teachers ask for help when things are not going perfectly. Discuss problems with those who can help to resolve them and remember that the job of a supervisor is to help you.
- **Be a good listener.** When others communicate with you, give them your undivided attention. This shows that you care and are truly interested.

- **Communicate with other new teachers.** You will discover that most new teachers are experiencing similar problems and you may be able to help each other solve them.
- **Develop a support network.** Colleagues of all ages and experience levels, former teachers and professional organizations—the profession is filled with individuals who are eager to share their time to help ensure your success.
- **Develop your own teaching style.** Use what works best for you. Work **with** your personality, not **against** it.
- **Build students' confidence.** Students will become self-confident when they know they can trust you.
- **Be consistent, yet flexible.** Do not vary expectations and format greatly, yet keep in mind that each student is different.
- **Expect students to respect others and model that behavior consistently.** Correct inappropriate behavior promptly and fairly.
- **Be prepared for every lesson.** Make a plan and stick to it. Think of your plan as a checklist of things to accomplish within a given time, and teach every class to the top of your game. *Never teach “by the seat of your pants.”*
- **Write down all contest and festival deadlines on a calendar.** Make sure you meet deadlines early. Many entries are by postmark deadline and you can't always be sure the envelope or package is postmarked the day it is mailed.
- **Always be on the lookout for new music. Visit local music stores; attend conferences, conventions and concerts in your search for new music.** Mark up programs and keep them in a separate file so that you are always ready to order should funds suddenly become available (this occurs frequently toward the end of the year when fiscal budgets have to be expended).
- **Select music for the students that they will learn from and enjoy.** As the students become more informed consumers of music, they will value a wider variety of literature.
- **Order extra scores for solos or parts in advance for future concerts and festivals.** Publishers get thousands of requests at the same time of the year.
- **Keep an accurate inventory of all instruments and uniforms.** This is necessary for insurance purposes and will help you design a replacement plan.
- **Review mailings that come from manufacturers and publishers.** These are designed to help you be successful. Plan to use interesting teaching and performing materials—and stay out of ruts. Challenge yourself!
- **Don't be afraid to promote your program, but do not do it at the expense of anyone else.** You should not start an “us-against-them” attitude.
- **Stay informed.** Join your state and national professional organization, and an arts-education advocacy group. Knowing what is happening on a state and national level will enable you to improve your local environment for arts education.
- **Stay current.** Professional development is critical to your success. Visit outstanding programs. Incorporate successful techniques you observe in your teaching. Share what you learn with your colleagues.
- **Enjoy yourself.** Don't take yourself too seriously. Humor is an important teaching tool.
- **Do your best. Nothing more can be asked.**

MOST IMPORTANTLY, make sure the students know you care. Students will not care what you know until they know that you care. As a wise student teaching supervisor once said, “You've got to love the kids.”

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