

## 8 Tips for Managing Your Classroom, Even When You Are Absent

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Having a substitute cover your classroom is inevitable. If not for an illness or personal reason, then surely professional development or a meeting will require you to be out of your classroom at some point. As many of us know, having a substitute can be a harrowing experience and is sometimes avoided at all costs. We find planning for the inevitable is the best way to ensure the day runs as smoothly as possible for everyone.



- 1. Keep students informed** When possible, let students know in advance when you'll be absent and who the substitute will be. Discuss the assignment, expectations, due date and what to do if they do/don't finish. Write assignments on the board and leave a brief note for students. These preparations help to clarify expectations, reduce students' anxiety, maintain a safe, positive, predictable environment and increase the likelihood that students will behave well in your absence.
- 2. Write thorough but brief lesson plans** Plans should include the daily schedule with times, bathroom breaks, when students leave the room for special services/breaks, or any regular routines students expect. Leave the names of two reliable students who can help, if needed. Give the name, schedule, and role of adults who work in your room and a teacher to call upon for help. Explain any individual behavior charts and detail who might need extra assistance. Briefly describe the assignments, where to find necessary materials, when they're due and what students do with the completed/uncompleted assignment. Leave an activity in case there's extra time. I've found that the most successful sub lessons are a continuation of an on-going project/assignment and extra practice of current (not new) material.
- 3. Create a sub folder** Include classroom and school-wide information in a clearly labeled and easy-to-find folder on your desk. Outline emergency information, beginning and ending of class/day procedures, how to take attendance and lunch count, hallway/bathroom procedures and information on the classroom management system. Include up-to-date roster(s) and seating chart(s). Leave technology passwords and instructions for use and who to ask for help. Leave copies of hall passes, attendance slips, and office referral forms. Include a feedback form for substitutes to leave you notes about who was absent, students who worked especially hard, students who did not follow expectations and any lingering questions.
- 4. Be organized** Leave sub folder and lesson plans where they can be seen. Label copies and materials with the class period or subject they're for and stack copies in the order they'll be used.
- 5. Use existing classroom management system** Before your absence, remind students of the classroom expectations/procedures and the positive and negative consequences they might expect based on their behavior when you return. Let students know you're leaving this information in the sub plans. Don't suspend positive and negative consequences just because you're gone. Instead, allow the substitute to use those to help the day run smoothly.

If you don't have a classroom management system, it is not too late to set [consistent expectations and consequences](#).

- 6. Provide snacks** I liked leaving a snack for the sub- maybe a bottle of water, a candy bar or an invitation to raid the snack drawer. I found substitutes really appreciated that!
- 7. Ask a partner teacher to check in** Ask a colleague to check in sometime in the morning to see if the substitute has all supplies and copies, the technology is working and if he/she has any questions. Having a point person increases the likelihood that the lesson plans will be accomplished.
- 8. Upon returning, discuss the day with students** Discuss how the day went from the students' point of view and share the notes the substitute left. Follow through on behavior problems, issuing any positive and negative consequences students earned.

In the end, we all want the day to run smoothly and for substitutes to return. Many districts have a substitute shortage. To get a sub to take the job and especially return can be a difficult task.

Try these eight suggestions to help: your classroom be welcoming, students know expectations and complete work, make it easier for the sub to implement plans, allow learning to continue in your absence and reduce your headache upon returning.