What to Do on the First Day and in the First Week

On the first day? Make sure every student feels like he or she belongs.

—Roxann Rose

In the first class on the first day I ever taught, I learned one of the biggest lessons of my middle school teaching career: the students are out for the teacher’s success just as much their own. On that Tuesday after Labor Day, I called roll.

“Brown, William?”
“Here.”

“Cavelletti, Antonio?”
“That’s, ‘Tony.’ And, here.”

I crossed out “Antonio” in the attendance book and wrote “Tony.”

“Thank you, Tony. I made the correction.”

Then I came to the third name. The last name was D-U-C-H. The first name seemed Cambodian or Vietnamese, so I didn’t think that the name was pronounced “Dutch.”

“Okay, this next person’s last name is pronounced ‘Duck,’ I believe,” I started with the class, then paused. I stared at the first name. No, it couldn’t be. I looked again. The first name was spelled “P-H-U-C.” If I said that phonetically, I would be calling the name of “Fuck Duck” (phonetically) in the middle of a group of thirty young adolescents. I naively plowed ahead.
“Phuh [using the short ‘u’ sound] . . . Phuh . . . Phuh,” I started again. The room was getting warmer. My cheeks burned. Great, I’m making a fool of myself on the very first day, I thought. I can’t do this.

Suddenly, the class called in unison, “It’s ‘Foo,’ Mr. Wormeli, ‘Foo.’ The ‘c’ is silent.”

I exhaled in relief, smiling sheepishly. “Thank you,” I mouthed. The students grinned back at me. “Foo Duck?” I called phonetically (pleadingly, too).

“Here,” Phuc said, and we continued with the roll call. We were going to be okay.

The biggest fears I had before that first day of school were how to plan out the year, whether or not the students would like and respect me, whether or not I knew enough about my subjects to teach them, and most important, what I was going to do with that first day and week of school. Once I was up and running, I thought I could handle it. “Just get me started,” I pleaded with the teacher gods.

It turns out I was barely ahead of the students in terms of learning the material that first year, and the planning for the rest of the year went well thanks to the patience of my colleagues, who tolerated twenty questions a day from me for that first quarter. My students seemed to respect me and, I hoped, enjoy my company, but I found out later that respecting me and enjoying my company weren’t the main goals of good teachers. It was the list I maintained of what I would do differently next year that kept me sane and hopeful that I’d make it as a teacher in the middle school world. The following year, I made those changes, especially in how we began the year, and it has made a tremendous difference every year since.

**Mixing Academics with Get-to-Know-You**

A sad thing happens to novels when readers have to stop after every chapter and write a summary or analyze literary devices: the story is killed; it’s no longer engaging. One of the worst things you can say to a language arts or English teacher is that a child learned to hate the subject as a result of his class. It’s the same with teachers of other courses.

As teachers, we are “selling” our subjects to our students as worthy of their pursuit. We are convincing them that they can be competent regarding our subjects and even find meaning in them. At the same time, students enter classrooms in September with the inclination to do well, to think in a scholarly manner, and to produce great thoughts and works. Really, they do. They are a grade higher, they reason, more advanced. Things will be challenging, and this is a fresh start. As their teachers, we need to ride this
momentum wave as far as we can. The expectancy and ability are there; all we have to do is get out of the way.

With each period of nothing but endless forms, get-to-know-you activities, and reviewing classroom protocols, we kill that excitement. Students grow increasingly disillusioned. We miss a golden opportunity for them to dive into the subject material with neurons firing on all thrusters. It’s probably the most significant time of the year to hardwire students’ minds to embrace our subjects; we don’t want to lose it. Yet we still have to get to know the students, ask them to fill out those school forms, and teach them classroom protocols, such as where to turn in papers and where to go during a fire drill. So how do we do all of this and keep the fires burning for our subjects at the same time?

Through balance. Each day, make sure students learn something brand-new in your subject area, not just something they are reviewing from last year. Add to this one or two new forms to complete, one get-to-know-you activity, or one or two new classroom protocols and you’ll have a pretty good period. Give academic homework on the first day of school. It sets a tone of serious study and responsibility. They may never admit it publicly (though many have privately), but after two months off from anything cerebral, students welcome the mental engagement. They’re doing something purposeful. Teach from the very first day.

To figure out what to offer them academically and administratively in that first week and month, go back to your planning for the year. Give yourself three to four weeks to teach all the classroom procedures, do the get-to-know-you activities, and fill out the forms. Don’t cram it into the first week or two. You’ll never have time to grab the students with your subject. Just make sure you complete the forms that let students get their lockers first!

Each day for the first two weeks, I do about 50 percent academics and 50 percent administrivia. This works pretty well. By the way, don’t forget your teammates if you’re on a team. One person doesn’t have to do all the forms. Spread out the responsibilities for completing forms across all subjects on the team so one subject isn’t always associated with paperwork. It’s wise, however, to have one teacher who collects all the forms from students. At a meeting later, all teachers on the team can help process them.

Getting to Know Students as Individuals and as Learners

If we want to be successful, we have to know our students as individuals and as learners. Often these overlap, but they are not the same dimension. Choose a balance of activities that elicits both types of information. Let’s...
take a look at three effective get-to-know-you activities appropriate for any subject:

“The Best Way for You to Learn” Cards

When students enter my room on the first day of school, they find an index card on their desks. Students are asked to describe on the cards how they best learn. The prompt can be something like, “What will it take for you to learn well in this subject?” or “In what ways do you best learn?” or “Give me advice on how to be the best teacher you’ve ever had in this subject.” It’s amazing how insightful students are each year. I get comments like, “Give me a lot of examples. I don’t get ideas without examples”; “If you write it on the board, can I get a copy?”; “I need to see it, don’t just tell me it”; and “Speak slowly, I get confused with a lot of noise and speed.” Many young adolescents are beginning to know and advocate for themselves as learners. What they offer in these cards is invaluable. To get the full picture, I send parents a card and similar prompt to complete on that first night, referring to their child’s learning. Between the two cards, I have enough information to make some early decisions about lesson design, grouping, and interacting with students. I reference them all year, and I sometimes ask students to complete them again in February to see if things have changed over the course of the first few months.

Interest Surveys

Interest surveys are one- to two-page polls that ask a variety of questions and give students an opportunity to express sides to them that don’t otherwise get revealed. The prompts or questions must not be invasive, of course, and students always have a right to pass if they don’t feel comfortable. Information that might be requested includes

- a favorite book from childhood
- the farthest point you’ve traveled away from home
- a recent movie you enjoyed and what you liked about it
- your favorite place to be and why
- your favorite food
- your favorite kind of music
- your favorite sport
- organizations/teams/clubs to which you belong
- someone you admire and why
- two common activities you do after getting home from school
- a responsibility you have
a wish you have for someone else
what you want to do for a career
something about which you daydream
something about which you are curious
the title of a book about your life
some advice you would give yourself if you could go back two years ago
a description of yourself as a friend
a description of your best friend

Learner Profiles

Learner profiles include any information about a student that affects his learning: six schools in as many years; divorce; ADHD; Fetal Alcohol Syndrome; learning disabilities. They also refer to those surveys/assessments/instruments that students complete in which they demonstrate their proclivities/strengths/preferences for how they best learn. There are many instruments available to middle school teachers, some costing money and some not. Ask around, as there are probably some in your building already. Many publications about multiple intelligences and learning styles have instruments free for your use. If you’re using an Internet search engine, I highly recommend the Dunn and Dunn Learning Style Inventory, Anthony Gregorc Scales, and Myers-Briggs Personality Type indicators. There are also many good Web sites and publications with multiple intelligence surveys. Students can often do the assessment as well as its analysis with direction from you, so don’t worry about analyzing the results of 150 student assessments. You just have to read the results and incorporate the information into your planning. No small job, I know.

Other Ideas for the First Day and the First Week

Problem-Solving Tasks

Some of you may be familiar with ropes initiatives courses. These are Project Adventure and similar courses in which students have to climb a twelve-foot wall, make it through eight swinging tires, pass each other through openings in a pretend spider’s web, and cross an “electric” fence. Bringing some of those ideas into the classroom or onto school grounds to see how students solve problems individually and as a group sheds light on who they are as students. For example, in the human knot activity, six to eight students stand in a circle shoulder-to-shoulder, facing the middle of the circle. They extend their hands into the center space, taking someone
else’s hand as long as it’s not the hand of the person on either side of them or both hands of the same person. They then unravel themselves without letting go of their grasps of one another’s hands. To do it, there’s a lot of stepping over and under, squeezing inside and outside, and most important, a lot of talk—students directing and listening to one another. It’s easy to see how students deal with physical contact, problem solving, leading, following, thinking critically, and speaking so that their ideas will be heard. In the debriefing that follows, we focus on what helped and what hindered the group, the roles that everyone played, and what we learned about ourselves.

We can mix some of these activities with content as well. For example, when we ask students to line up in ascending order according to birthdays, they do it easily, even when we ask them to do it without talking. Add another twist—blindfolds on everyone as well as the silence—and it becomes more challenging. We can use this activity for content study as well. How about lining up in ascending order in terms of numerical value? Students are placed in groups of twelve, holding cards of various value and forms—percents, decimals, and fractions—then asked to line up from smallest to greatest. How about lining up in order of steps in the ecological succession of a deciduous forest? How about in a pattern of category, example, category, example, such as, “noun, giraffe, verb, is, demonstrative pronoun, this, personal pronoun, you”? Or in order of conjugation of an irregular verb in Spanish? How about in order of taxonomy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Animalia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phylum</td>
<td>Chordata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Mammalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Primates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Hominidae</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genus</td>
<td>Homo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Species</td>
<td>Sapiens</td>
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</table>

Now do it silently . . . now do it blindfolded. Just because we teachers can’t imagine how it can be done doesn’t mean the kids won’t do it beautifully. They will outdo us, which is exactly the way it’s supposed to be if things are going well.

In the course of these experiences, we see sides to our students that the regular classroom interaction prevents us from seeing. They’re worth doing.

In-Class Field Trip

Take students on a tour of the classroom. If there’s enough space, get them out of their seats and have them follow you around as you point out differ-
ent features of the room—the portfolio area, computer stations, the in-
class library (a must for all subjects, not just English class), sink areas, sup-
ply areas, walls for student work, the homework assignment posting area
(use an old Boogie Board from the beach; it will hold tacks well without
leaving little holes behind after removing postings), paper-turn-in areas,
plants and animals, photos of your family, instructional bulletin boards,
sign-in sheets for tardy students, extra handouts trays, and anything else
that is unique to your class.

Textbook Scavenger Hunt

If the textbook for your course is going to be referenced often, take stu-
dents on a scavenger hunt through the book in the first week of school.
This familiarizes them with how the book is set up. That familiarity
increases the likelihood that students will use the textbook as the frequent
resource it was meant to be, and it makes students more autonomous.

To prepare a scavenger hunt on the textbook, review the textbook
yourself and identify how it’s structured and which areas you’ll want stu-
dents to reference throughout the year. Don’t worry that you don’t know
which areas these are right now. Take your best guess for what you know
for sure, and ask colleagues for their opinion. Depending on your subject,
these textbook elements might include

- units
- chapters
- subtopics
- sidebars
- “questions to ponder” sections
- chapter summaries
- time lines
- background of the author/editor
- copyright date
- explanation versus application
- pages
- glossaries
- indices
- tables of contents
- “words to know” sections
- scope and sequence of the textbook
- major themes of the textbook
- enrichment sections
- where major topics are located
- autobiographies of experts in
- your subject area

Once you’re familiar with the textbook, create prompts for these elements
that require students to search for them. For example:

- What are the five basic themes of our textbook? (hint: they are color-
coded in the table of contents)
- Though they are written out of order here, you’ll find the following
components in all chapters: Applications, Chapter Review, Samples,
Extensions, Practice, Introduction, Words to Know, Background, How Does It Fit with What We Know? Place them in proper order according to how our textbook sequences them in each chapter.

- Who invented the periodic table of elements?
- Does pressure go up or down as air speed increases?
- In what section would we find information about where to place a comma in a divided quote?
- In what section would we find the definition of coefficient?
- Has this book been updated in the last ten years?
- In what section of each chapter would we find creative ideas for projects about the chapter’s topic?
- If we wanted to test our knowledge about a chapter’s topic, in what section would we find a test to do that?

Don’t make the textbook survey more than one or two pages. I recommend that you ask students to work individually on this so they get the knowledge firsthand. If you decide to ask students to work in pairs or table groups, make it necessary for everyone in the group to agree on the answers, forcing them to check up on one another.

Tour the School

In the first few days, make sure you or a teammate takes students new to the school on a tour of the building. This not only relieves anxiety but creates autonomy and opens students’ minds to other possibilities. For example, students who’ve never considered the art elective (or “encore” class as some schools call electives), walk by the kiln and see ceramic sculptures firing. They file that vividly in their memories for next year’s electives. Students struggling with a project later in the year might remember the tour they took with you through the multimedia lab and ask to work there after school. “Those drama students look like they are having fun,” a student remarks while on the tour, and the seed is planted for a new interest. Another benefit of a school tour: you will have a whole class of knowledgeable messengers to run errands to other parts of the building for you.

Walk the Fire Drill Route

In every period, walk the students out of the classroom according to the fire drill route posted in the room or your teacher’s manual. Do this after sitting for a while and it will be well received—it’ll also get oxygen to the brain. Make sure to review proper conduct for fire drills such as no talking
or running, moving quickly, facing away from the building, and responding clearly when roll is called outside the building.

What to Do When the Teacher’s Not Available

Oscar Wilde reminded us that the goal of every teacher is to put himself out of a job. He’s right; we want students to learn all we have to teach them and move on to bigger and better things. We do that with our curriculum, and we do that with classroom management.

Spend ample time in the first week or month teaching students what to do if they have a problem with something and the teacher is working with someone else and not available for assistance. As you teach these options, post them at the front of the room as an easy reference for everyone. Cover all the bases. What students should do if

- Their pencil breaks.
- Someone is bothering them.
- They need more paper or other supplies.
- They can’t find the directions.
- They need to use the bathroom.
- They are tardy to class.
- They can’t find the page in the book.
- They need someone to look over their work.
- They finish early.
- They don’t finish in time.
- They need their portfolio.
- They have a problem with the computer.
- They don’t feel good.
- They don’t understand the problem.
- A visitor comes to the classroom door.
- They become upset about something.
- They want to get a drink.
- An animal gets out of its cage.
- It starts snowing outside (and “Will we get out early?” becomes the all-consuming topic of the day).
- Other situations that students brainstorm.

Remember, you don’t have to have answers for all of these scenarios. Put them out there for students to consider. They’ll come up with great responses. Be prepared to help them sift through the not-so-helpful ones, however.
Introduce Yourself

I usually wait until the second or third week to introduce myself so that students are clearly the focus of the class, but it’s important that we do this early in the year rather than remain mysterious to them. Young adolescents need role models who are moral, competent, and engaged citizens with personal interests. Find ways to tell students about your family, hobbies, interests, career plans, and hopes. Give them a three-dimensional picture of who you are as a person. Love the Washington Redskins? Let them see the strength of your devotion to the team. Work on Saturdays at the homeless shelter? Coach baseball or swimming? Going camping this fall? Love Milky Way bars, dolphins, or the state university? Let them see these sides of you. I can’t emphasize this enough—students succeed with adults who are not coy or secretive about who they are. Young adolescents respond well to adults with whom they feel some connection, and whom they find vivid.

This doesn’t mean you need to talk about yourself every day or spend a whole period presenting your family album. It means putting up family pictures on your desk or a nearby wall, mentioning items of personal interest in the news, telling a few appropriate stories from your past if they fit with the lesson, displaying Gary Larson posters if you’re into his humor, joking about a weakness for chocolate chip cookies when students want a good grade on a project, and posting your graduation certificates (after all, this is your professional office, so post those certificates just as we’d see in a doctor’s or lawyer’s office). Students will take these aspects of you to heart. They’ll be a way to connect with you throughout the year. Better yet, you’ve given them a personalized vision of how to grow and become a successful adult. They’ll see their lives as a journey, not an instant arrival and you as someone in a position of respect who has a well-rounded life with varied interests. They need a clear image in order to achieve it. For some, you are the only image they have of what’s it’s like to be a healthy, involved adult. That vision will transcend everything else you teach.

Heading Their Papers, Setting Up the Notebook

In the first few days, explain to students how to head their papers with name, date, subject, and page number on the top, right side, left side, or center of the paper. Whatever you choose, try to be consistent across the team or school. It’s frustrating when teachers force students to jump through seven different and arbitrary hoops, heading their papers a different way for every teacher they have. Get rid of this stress by using the same format as your teammates.
Students also need direction on how to set up their notebooks, but don’t proscribe too much; students need some individuation. Give them the section titles for their notebook tabs, for example, but let them choose the sequence in which they’re placed, if possible.

Daily Poem(s)

No matter what you teach, try to share a new poem daily. Poetry is not for the elite only; it is for every person. It gives dimension to learning and living, and it’s something on which our minds can snack all day. A poem that is initially opaque to us can snap our heads back with stunning clarity, given an experience later in the day. It doesn’t matter if we are poetry-phobic or can’t think of one poem that we understand, let alone share. Remember that you are not alone on your faculty. Seek assistance from an English, language arts, or reading specialist in your building, or from your school’s media specialist (a.k.a. librarian). A daily poem sets a thoughtful tone for the room in math, history, science, music, technology, Spanish, French, Latin, art, and drama classes, not just English classes. If you make a habit of it, you’ll have that tone, and you’ll find students looking forward to it, even to the point of bringing in poems for you to share. Some of these will be original poems by those students, some written by others, but all about something important to students. An added dividend: some students may start writing poetry about your subject’s content as a way to learn it.

Explain the Schedule

Just like many of us adults, young adolescents want to see the big picture, and they require constant reminders of the details to achieve it. Go out of your way during the first few days to explain the general class schedule—opening activities, objectives explained, learning experiences, summarization—as well as the daily schedule—times for class periods and passing times between classes. If you have a block schedule, go over its unique meeting times in every period, especially if it’s a flexible, rotating block. It’s not reasonable to expect young adolescents to have heard the schedule first period and remember it the entire day, especially during the first week of school.

Teach Study Skills

Begin teaching students how to take notes, use graphic organizers, and review new knowledge in the very first week. Again, it sets a tone for serious study, but it also gives them the tools they need to learn for themselves.
Remember that middle school is the first experience young adolescents have with reading for information, managing complex information, and expressing that information in a scholarly manner. Our students don’t come into middle schools knowing how to study material successfully. We have to teach this over the two to three years we have with them. Create success a month from now by teaching study skills today.

Great study skills to teach early in the year and then reinforce each week of the year include at least five different ways to take notes, how to determine what is important in a reading passage and how to summarize it, how to learn new vocabulary, how to prepare for a test, how to manage your study time effectively, and how to know when you don’t know (how to monitor your comprehension of something). Several books listed in Appendix B provide excellent strategies to teach these skills. Among them are *Words, Words, Words* (Allen 1999), *Learning to Learn* (Frender 1990), *Write Source 2000* (Great Source Reading Group 2000), and *I Read It, but I Don’t Get It* (Tovani 2001).

Remember, you can teach content and study skills at the same time. For instance, if you are teaching two-column note taking, you can do it with the material you want students to master, such as President Wilson’s Fourteen-Points speech.

### Major Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons President Wilson</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Designed the Plan for Peace</td>
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### Three Immediate Effects on U.S. Allies

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### Three Structures/Protocols Created by the Plans

<table>
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### Reveal Pet Peeves

Don’t ask me why, but it really drives me nuts when my students spell *a lot* as one word, *alot*. I go out of my way to teach them the proper way to use these words, but some students continue to make the mistake. It’s a small thing, but it gets under my skin: it’s a pet peeve. I felt the same way in math about not lining up columns when students did long division, or bringing down the variable on the left side of equations when solving for the variable in algebra problems.
Letting students know your pet peeves right away does two things: First, it serves notice in a due-process manner about items for which they will be held accountable, formally or informally, in our classes. Second, it makes students aware of negative behaviors and helps them learn the proper ways to do things.

You can do this in ways that are not harsh. I often dress up as a character that becomes increasingly distressed with each occurrence of my pet peeves in a particular discipline. The character is known as Peeved and Ugly, and the costume includes a black graduation robe, a long gray wig, and green makeup with smudges of charcoal on my face. I “uglify” the character completely: I dip my hands in Elmer’s glue and let it dry before wrinkling it to look like acid burned my skin, and I create sores all over my face using blobs of Vaseline covered with tissue paper blended into the green makeup. The hideous countenance and nasty demeanor make me peevled and ugly to students, especially when I get close to their faces and cackle my pet peeves. I overdramatize my dismay, the students laugh, and the message hits home.

Communicate Grading, Homework, and Classroom Policies

On the first day of school, send students home with a quick reference sheet on your classroom policies regarding grading, homework, and other management aspects. This proactive step prevents numerous misunderstandings and bad feelings down the road. It’s particularly effective if your practices are consistent with other members of your team, but that’s not absolutely necessary.

How you choose to communicate these policies is up to you. You may want students to read each section of the sheet privately while in class and respond to prompts you’ve given, or you may want them to review the information in class in small groups, listing questions that arise. You can then respond to these group questions with the whole class. It could also become a homework assignment for them to go home and explain the policies to their parents, with Mom or Dad signing off at the bottom when they’ve read and understood the policies. That signature is important for your protection, too. If there’s ever a complaint that students or parents did not know your policy regarding something on the quick reference sheet, the signature is proof that they did.

Figure 2.1 is a sample quick reference I’ve been using for the past few years. The teaching philosophy that it promotes may or may not be what you prefer, but it is important to have your particular information all in one place for easy parent and student reference throughout the year.
Parents’ Quick Reference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
<th>English 7 Policies and Practices</th>
<th>Crusaders Team, Mr. Wormeli</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A = 4.0–3.7</td>
<td>C+ = 2.6–2.2</td>
<td>D = 1.1–1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+ = 3.6–3.2</td>
<td>C = 2.1–1.7</td>
<td>F = 0.9 and lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B = 3.1–2.7</td>
<td>D+ = 1.6–1.2</td>
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If a particular assessment is more clearly expressed by percentages or points, it will be done that way for your child, but the score will be converted to the 4.0-scale equivalent before being recorded in the gradebook. Tests, writings, and projects are weighted more heavily than quizzes and homework. Assignments that are given checks or zeroes count no more than 10% of your child’s overall academic grade. Checks and zeroes describe the extent of your child’s practice with the content and skills, not mastery thereof. Be assured, however, that a check means your child has a good grasp of the content or skill intended; otherwise, a check minus or a zero will be recorded.

Personal growth as well as mastery of English skills and knowledge are more important than grades. Please help your child keep perspective on his or her achievement. While we focus on academics, we will also build stable and compassionate individuals. In this class, our school’s Mission Statement is fully recognized:

Within a safe and nurturing community, the students, staff, and parents of Rachel Carson Middle School seek to foster personal and academic excellence, treat one another with dignity, respect our environment, embrace diversity, and develop character which merits trust and honor. We encourage positive risk taking and perseverance in pursuit of our goals.

Redoing Assessments (including tests, quizzes, projects, writings, and assignments):
At teacher discretion, any assessment may be redone if the student did not completely master the intended content or skills, and the student has demonstrated sincere effort to prepare for the assessment the first time it was given. Rigorous relearning or review in preparation for a second attempt will qualify a student to redo an assessment. Redoing assessments is a privilege, not something to be taken for granted. Students must redo assessments within one week of their return; otherwise the original grade stands. The higher grade between the original attempt and the second attempt will be recorded, not an average of the two grades. Occasionally, assessments cannot be redone, but instead students may correct their mistakes and receive half credit for each item they correct. Students must redo assessments on their own time, not during direct teaching time in our class. In order to redo any test, major project, major writing, or quiz, students must first submit the original work signed by a parent and requesting the retest or redo opportunity.

Makeup Work:
Students are expected to contact their homework partners (study buddies) to determine missing work when absent, or they may access our class’s homework Web site on Schoolnotes.com described below. They may also stay after school to record missing assignments, get explanations, and work on makeup assignments. They are allowed the same number of days they were gone to make up the work, unless a note is received from parents requesting more time. If you have access to e-mail, don’t forget to use it to get caught up quickly. School: 555-3600. Mr. Wormeli’s e-mail: rwormeli@erols.com.

Homework:
There is a list of all homework assignments made for each period posted on the homework board (a surfboard) in our room. Students should be encouraged to review that list regularly. If you or your child would like to see the homework for the day (posted after school), please access Schoolnotes.com on the Web and enter our school’s zip code: 20171. Once there, find my name, click on it, and the day’s homework will be listed. You can go directly to the homework listing for our class using http://schoolnotes.com/20171/wormeli99.html.
No homework is ever assigned on weekends or holidays in our English class. Those times are reserved for students to be with their families, relax, get exercise, and come back ready to learn on the next school day. At their discretion, students may choose to work over weekends and holidays on long-term projects, rough drafts, or their student choice books. If a student is working beyond his or her normal bedtime on homework, please tell him or her to stop and go to bed. Sleep and health will do more for a student’s education than finishing assignments when the student is tired. In these situations, parents need to send in a note asking for a brief extension of completion time in order for students to receive full credit. Please be aware of the student’s need to manage his or her life such that homework is a priority—sports, music, church, Scouts, visits from relatives, time with friends and family events are just some of the things that can make a student too tired to do homework each night. Creating balance is a vital skill to learn while in middle school.

**Student Papers:**
Papers with no names are put into a “No Name, No Credit” tray. A student may check the tray and upon finding his or her work, write his or her name on it and resubmit it. The tray is emptied into the trash every few weeks. Once assignments are evaluated by Mr. Wormeli, they are placed in a tray called “Papers to Be Returned to Students.” If a student hasn’t had a paper returned in a while, he or she should check there.

**Writing Portfolios:**
A Writing Portfolio contains the final versions of student writings, and reflections on those writings and the student’s progress and goals this year. It is the most valid statement of the students as writers and thinkers. Students will place all graded writings in these portfolios after they are reviewed by Mr. Wormeli. These collected works are kept on bookshelves in our classroom. Please feel free to stop by and view your child’s portfolio at any point in the year, or send in a note and we’ll send it home for your review. We will send it home for official parent review at the end of each semester.

**Visiting:**
You are encouraged to visit our English classroom any day you wish. If you want to see your child’s class, be sure to ask him or her when his or her English class meets. The front office folks are very careful to prevent interruptions to our class, so they will want to confirm your visit with me before letting you proceed to room C107. Please be sure to call ahead to make sure they know you are coming. They’ll check with me if I haven’t already told them about your visit, and they’ll provide you with a visitor’s badge.

**Contacting Teachers:**
Our school number is 555-3600. I can be contacted through e-mail as well at rwormeli@erols.com. This is my home e-mail address and I check it each evening between 9:00 and midnight. The school’s address is Rachel Carson Middle School, 13618 McLearen Road, Herndon, Virginia 20171.

**Extra Supplies?**
Keep your eyes and ears open for extra paper, pens, pencils, markers, erasers, tape, scissors, hole punches, and staplers! We maintain an in-class supply center, which frequently needs replenishing. We’re also looking for puzzles! We’re looking for problem-solving puzzles (written or using manipulatives or physical objects) on which students can work if they finish assignments early or for use during our “Puzzle Day” activity period. Put your name on the puzzle if you want it returned to your family.

**Want to Volunteer?**
Send in a note stating your name, your child’s name, your phone number, and your interest in volunteering. Indicate whether you can do work only in your home, or if you’re available to help at school. We’ll contact you with a list of possibilities given your availability and get you started right away.
The first moments in the first class we teach each year are exhilarating. We’re on the edge, capable of toppling or soaring in a heartbeat. And though middle schoolers will never admit it, they are eager to explore our subjects and be successful students. We can use that knowledge to craft experiences that stimulate students while completing the required first-week administrivia. That balance in the first week of school between advanced study in our subject areas and establishing classroom protocols is key.

After twenty years of first days each September, it never fails to amaze me how fast the time goes. Suddenly it’s a week later and we wonder why we were ever worried about filling the time and engaging students. For many of us, there’s solace in the fact that we teach the same subject more than one period a day. We can fix all the mistakes we make in the first period when we do it again in subsequent periods. The opportunity to start fresh with the wisdom of our previous experience is something we extend to our students and ourselves at the same time every first week of the school year.