First day as a substitute teacher: a printable checklist

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Your first day as a sub in order, from the night before to signing out, with a 26-line checklist you can tick on your phone or print.

Your first day as a substitute teacher goes well when you arrive 20 to 30 minutes early, get the key, the attendance method and the bell schedule from the office, read the whole plan once before the bell, and leave a short note for the teacher at the end. The full list, in order, is a free first-day checklist you can tick on your phone or print. This post was written by Peabody (peabody.kids), a free reading and learning site for children that is free through the end of 2026. The checklist lives on our teachers' site, Peabody Teach. Your ticks stay in your browser and are never sent to us.

The night before

Check the assignment: the school, the room, the grade or subject, the start time, and whether it is a half or full day. Look up the address, the parking and which door subs use. Pack your bag: ID, a water bottle, a lunch that needs no microwave, two pens, a watch and a book to read aloud. Our sub bag list has the rest.

One more thing helps more than any other: make a backup plan for that grade on your phone with the Sub Plan Generator. If the teacher left a full plan, you never use it. If they left nothing, you print it at the office.

Arriving

Arrive early and sign in at the office. Ask four questions there:

1. Where is the room key?
2. How is attendance taken and sent?
3. What is the bell schedule today?
4. Do I cover any duty: recess, bus or lunch?

Then ask where the emergency plan is, how to call the office from the room, and who to call if a student needs help you can't give. The answers differ from school to school, and the office's answer is the one that counts.

In the room, before the bell

Find the plans: on the desk, in a folder marked Sub, in the teacher's planner, or on the computer screen. Find the seating charts and the class list. Find the drill map by the door and the emergency folder.

Introduce yourself to the teacher next door and ask one question: what should I know about this class? Write your name, the date and the day's schedule on the board. Read the whole plan once, and set out the first sheets.

The first five minutes

Stand at the door and greet students as they come in. Say your name, one sentence about yourself, and the plan for the day. Ask the class which quiet signal their teacher uses, and use it rather than inventing your own. Take attendance from the seating chart and send it the way the office asked. Our guide to the first five minutes goes through each step.

During the day

Follow the plan in order and cross off each part on the board as you finish it. Students like to see the day move. Keep finished work in a pile per block or period, labeled. Note anything that happens as you go: the time, what happened, what you did. When a question depends on the school, ask the office or the teacher next door rather than guessing.

If a block ends early, the no-prep activity picker offers three activities that fit the minutes you have left and what the room allows.

Before you leave

Tidy the room with the class before dismissal. Dismiss students the way the school does it, and ask the office about anyone whose way home isn't clear. Write the note to the teacher and leave it on the desk with the work. The note page has the headings teachers want and a bank of sentences that describe events, not children. Return the key and sign out.

After the day

Write down the school, the grade and what worked while you still remember. A one-page record helps you say yes or no to the next call, and it shows a school you came back ready. The sub log keeps those rows in your browser and prints them.

A story for the end of the day

If you finish early, a short read-aloud closes the day well. Peabody's library has free stories by reading level you can show on a projector. Everything else for subs, from sample days by grade to quizzes and guides, is at teach.peabody.kids/sub.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/first-day-as-a-substitute-teacher