

25 Ways to Save Time & Take Home Less Work

1. **Don't grade everything.** If you are grading every piece of work your students do, I have one word for you. STOP!!!! This is way too overwhelming & takes way too much time. What you want to do instead is to collect work randomly and tell the kids that any piece of work they do *could* be taken for a grade. That way, they have the incentive to always try their best, but you're not buried in paperwork.
2. **Make the most of your work times.** I realize this is easier said than done, as it seems like something is always coming up, but try to really buckle down & work during your "free" hours. Don't waste the first ten minutes on Facebook or a leisurely walk down to the lounge to get coffee. Get focused right away and get done as much as you can in those precious, fleeting minutes.
3. **Take advantage of a few minutes here and a few minutes there.** I truly believe this is one of the reasons I've always been able to get more done than my peers. When I have 3 minutes here or even 30 seconds there, I am grading. Or I am working on my to-do list. Or I am planning. I am doing something! And while 2 minutes here and 1 minute there don't seem like much, they definitely add up. I'm normally able to grade stacks of papers during the day just by claiming these unused minutes. I keep a stack of papers at my podium and when there's a lull in teaching, I grade. (Disclaimer: the lull is because kids are workingwe know there should never be an actual lull - oh the horror that will ensue!!)
4. **Learn to type faster.** Okay, I know this isn't something you have time to do in the middle of the school year, but if you're a slow or even an average typer, put this on your summer to-do list. Being able to type quickly has saved me **so much time!!!** Writing lesson plans, crafting emails, creating worksheets, entering grades....all of these require typing, and the faster you can type, the faster these tasks gets done. Seriously, it will be well worth your time. (And there are lots of free online typing programs.)
5. **Forgo the elaborate decorations and visuals** (at least for now). If you find you're spending hours on the perfect bulletin board or a new, fantastic helpers chart, it's time for a paradigm switch. I know these things are flashy and showy, but they don't really help your students learn any better and they can take A LOT of time. You can make your classroom fun and colorful without spending hours on the decorations. Think pre-made posters, student work, etc. If you really love this side of teaching, then keep it as part of your day, but consider scaling back until you get your time more under control. Once you're more efficient and have more time, you'll be able to do more.
6. **Focus on efficiency, not speed.** If you're anything like me, when you try to rush & get a task done quickly, you make mistakes. Then you have to go back and correct them, and you end up not saving time at all. In fact, often you end up taking even longer. Instead, focus on efficiency. Have a stack of grading? Try to be efficient - that means working at your maximum productivity. So be focused, don't get distracted, and work to the best of your ability. But don't rush.

7. **Make grading as easy as possible.** Now I've already told you not to grade everything, but when you do grade classwork or homework (smaller grades), make the grading as easy as possible. My strategy for homework is to have the kids grade each others' in class and to put a question mark if they are not sure or think someone graded their paper wrong. I don't take time to go over the whole paper if there isn't a question mark. I just put on the grade and move on. I also make the math easy.....Even though there are typically only 6 problems, I take off 5 points for each incorrect problem (if they at least make a valiant attempt. If they don't try a problem, that's another story). This not only makes my grading easier but it also allows students to learn from their mistakes without being killed on their practice grades.

Now I don't take any shortcuts for quizzes and tests. On those, I take the time needed to go through each problem & give partial credit. This takes a lot of time, but it's worth it to me. The key is to prioritize - what is truly worth the time and what just needs a quick grade in the gradebook?

8. **Ditch the rubrics.** Another way I saved time with grading was by being creative with my grading sheets for writing projects. I created a grading sheet that consisted of all the things I expected of them. I then circle everything that is incorrect or subpar and put a check mark or smiley face by everything they did well. I don't use a rubric on the grading sheet....I either grade holistically or have a rubric in my head. Not having to do the math saves lots of time, and the circles and checks justify the grade well (while also keeping me from having to write out a million notes).
9. **Keep track of your lesson plans from year to year.** We all know that every time we teach a new course or have a new curriculum (or have to learn Common Core), everything is more time-consuming. But be diligent about taking those extra few minutes to keep track of what you're doing this year, what's working well, and what's not. If you have it all in one place at the end of the year, you'll thank yourself a million times over when you don't have to reinvent the wheel next year.
10. **Organize your files (both physical & digital).** Okay, you knew we were gonna' get to organization. I'm not saying you have to be uber-organized. I'll be honest - my storage closet was a bit of a mess. But the things you use most often - the files you always need to access - those need to be organized so you don't waste time searching high & low for something that should be right there. (Okay, this still happens to me too often because sometimes I'm not paying attention & put something in the wrong place. But the more organized I am, the less this happens.) And your computer - don't keep every document you have in "My Documents." Have a folder for each course, then within that course, a folder for each chapter or section, etc. Make things easy to find so that you're not searching & searching & searching &.....
11. **Master copy & paste.** When writing lesson plans, crafting emails, or developing assessments, get in the habit of asking yourself, "Did I already create something similar?" If so, find it, copy & paste, and then tweak. I use this especially with emails. How many times have you emailed a parent about a student not doing his homework? Craft a generic email template & keep it somewhere. Then, whenever you need to email a parent, start with the template & customize it to fit the situation.

12. **Get help from your students.** Are you responsible to clean your room? Use the last minute of class to have your students pick up trash off the floor. Students also like to help with various classroom tasks....for me it's always washing overheads (Yes, I still use an overhead projector.....it works.)
13. **Enlist help from parents, teachers' aides, friends, and family.** Students can be a great help, but there's some things they just can't do - like grade their own tests. For more advanced tasks, enlist some help. And train your help!! Teach them exactly how you want a task done so that you don't end up having to redo it. And don't be afraid to gently redirect them when they don't do it quite right - this extra effort will pay off when they can soon do the task as well as you.
14. **Use online resources, but don't browse indefinitely.** Online worksheets and websites can help us save lots of time, but browsing the web for the perfect worksheet can end up taking a lot longer than just creating one yourself. My strategy is to have a few go-to sites that have excellent worksheets. When I need one, I check those, but if they don't have what I want, I make my own. (Maybe a QUICK Google search is okay, but you know how quickly a *quick* search becomes a *long* search.....I would just let it go....or set a timer.)
15. **Avoid social media during school hours.** We all know this, but it sure is easy to get sucked into the Facebook vortex. Now I know that social media can be a great resource for classroom ideas, but here's what I recommend: use them at home. While you're at work, get all the tasks done that feel like work. When you're at home, relax on the couch with Pinterest or your favorite Facebook teachers' group.
16. **Give the impression that you grade more than you do.** While we want our students to do their best every time, there is simply no way we have time to grade every piece of paper. Here's a great solution: collect papers all the time but either put them directly into your outbox or flip through them and put check marks and smiley faces on the ones that look pretty good at a glance. This takes about 1 minute and makes the kids feel as if their work is being noticed and valued.
17. **Find an efficient way to deal with absent work requests.** Absent work requests can start to really make a dent in our time, especially when the flu's going around. Come up with an efficient way of dealing with them - a way that will take you the least amount of time possible. For me, my simplified week-long lesson plans fit on a single sheet of paper and include homework, tests, quizzes, and an overview of what lessons & topics we are covering. I simply hit print and staple it to the request form or copy & paste it into an email. Attach any necessary worksheets, and I'm done. This may not work with your system, but find something that does. Something fast. Something efficient.
18. **Get up a little earlier.** Ahhhh, I know these are like the words of death. Get up earlier? Are you kidding me? I get up so early already! I know, I hear you. And I'll be honest, while I was teaching I didn't really do this, but since I've transitioned to staying home with my little one and writing, I've started to make this a priority, and wow has it helped me be more productive! Even just 15-30 extra minutes in the morning when you're fresh can save you 30 minutes to an hour of work in the evening. The morning time is just so much more productive. So when your alarm clock goes off early & you want to hit snooze, imagine yourself relaxing on your couch that evening or getting to go to bed early.

19. **Don't promise to send regular reports to parents.** Unless it's required by your administration, don't promise to send regular progress reports to parents. Not only does this take time, but if you forget even once, you've broken your promise. Instead, when parents ask for a report, ask them to email or call you, and tell them you'll be sure to respond. This puts the responsibility back where it belongs – with the parents. And you only have to hit Reply to the emails that come, instead of trying to remember to send them. [I talk more about this in my book *Create Your Dream Classroom*.]
20. **Send bulk emails when appropriate.** Bulk emails are a great way to communicate quickly & efficiently. It's a lot faster than typing, printing, & passing out a form, and more parents actually see it. But bulk emails can be used for more than just announcements. Are there 8 kids who didn't turn in their projects? Instead of contacting each one individually, send one email to all of them. Just put the email addresses in the BCC field so that the parents won't see who else got the email. (I am not saying to do this all the time. Often we need to write a more personalized email or even pick up the phone. But using bulk emails when it is appropriate will free up time for when you need to be more detailed.)
21. **Don't agonize over the possibility of a typo in an email.** Now I know that we teachers want to be accurate & professional in all our interactions (and we should be). But it's not worth our time to scour our emails over and over in search of an elusive typo. Typos happen. They are part of life. And parents understand. Now, there certainly shouldn't be a ton of them, but a typo here & there are going to slip through, and it's just not worth our time to read each email 6 times just in case.
22. **Don't double-check your grading key.** When you write your own test, don't bother to double-check your answer key, especially for math problems. Instead, grade your best student's test first, and double-check any answers they appear to get wrong. You should be able to catch any mistakes pretty easily – and take much less time than it would to rework every problem.
23. **Learn how to better use your computer.** If you're not that comfortable with your computer, you will do yourself a huge favor by learning how to use it more efficiently. Consider taking a computer class over the summer or simply ask a more tech-savvy colleague for some tips. The better you know how to use your computer, the more efficient you'll be and the more time you'll save.

Here's my favorite time-saving computer tip: To switch from window to window, hold down Alt and hit Tab (on PC's). You can then tab through all your open programs. Try it. Pretty cool, huh?

24. **Take time to get to the root of the problem.** This may sound like the opposite of a time-saving tip, but the time you invest now will save you much more in the long run. When dealing with parents, students, or even fellow educators, take time to find & discuss the real issues. That way, you can actually make progress towards resolving them instead of uselessly repeating the same conversation 10 more times.
25. **Pray for clarity & efficiency.** I listed this one last, but it is by no means the least important. Without God, we can do nothing. He is our strength, our help, and our rest. He can and will give us clarity and help us work more efficiently. And if we're listening, He'll also help us balance our lists of tasks with our greater purpose: helping our students.