Substitute teaching is a great way to get your career going. It develops you as an educator, makes you feel more comfortable in the classroom, gives you a repertoire of teaching strategies, and adds teaching experience to your résumé.

Substituting is like playing sports: you never know what is going to happen. You have to be prepared for the unexpected. You are walking into the classroom of another teacher who has already established routines and a rapport with the students. Sometimes the lessons provided aren’t...
substantial enough or there are no plans available at all. While other teachers may help you, it is best to be prepared. Use these tips, strategies, and ideas to make your subbing experience more rewarding and enjoyable.

**Step 1. Research, volunteer at, or observe in the school.** Substitutes often pick school districts that are close to their homes. However, if you do not research the schools in the district, the school’s policies, mission statement, beliefs, demographics, and even the teachers, may not be familiar. This contributes to difficulty fitting into the school or adhering to policies or connecting with the staff.

By volunteering, you can establish relationships with various teachers who can help you throughout the day. Volunteering helps you know the locations of teaching materials, the layout of the classrooms, and the procedures used in the school.

**Step 2. Know your comfort zone.** Do not put yourself in a situation where you are uncomfortable. If you are called to be a substitute in a high school, but all your training is in elementary curriculum, do not be afraid to stick to what you know and say “no” to the job.

**Step 3. Arrive fully prepared.** Bring lessons, assignments, and books for all grades—not just for the grade you were told you’d cover. It is not unusual to get a phone call asking you to sub in a first grade classroom, but find out when you arrive that you are now subbing in third grade. If you gathered all the materials and lessons for first grade only, you may have a problem.

The best way to prepare for this situation is to pack a **SUPER-SUB BAG**, which contains:

- **Children’s books** for all grades. You should know these books well.
- **Lesson plans** you have created and used. Keep a binder of lesson plans and ideas. Review and update these lesson plans weekly.
- **Games and activities** that are interesting and fun and apply to more than one grade level. For example, I have created a card game using math skills like long division and subtraction.
- **Appropriate newspaper articles or children’s magazines** along with worksheets or activities to accompany the articles. These should be in-depth, fun, and interesting. For example, I once used an article about the soda ban in New York City. I had students write a letter to the Mayor of New York stating why they agreed or disagreed with the ban. This can be adapted for a variety of grade levels.

Clean and update your bag often. A bag that is ready to pick up as you leave will make your day go smoothly.

**Step 4. Introduce yourself to students and state your rules.** Give a short introduction stating your name and your objectives for the day. You may want to create rules to help maintain classroom management so that the students know what you expect from them.

**Step 5. Leave the classroom teacher a note.** This is a great way to inform the classroom teacher of what transpired during the day. It should not be filled with all the negative things that happened but instead include the list of activities you and the students did that day. The note should also explain how you altered a provided lesson.

**Step 6. Clean the room.** Leave the room looking neat and orderly. Clean any mess that was created during the day.

**Step 7. Be professional.** Remember that while students may act up since their teacher is not there, you should always be professional. Stay calm and be careful what you do and say.

Substitute teaching can help you get a full-time teaching position. With subbing, you will build a network of administrators and staff. You’ll build confidence and experience. And you will be prepared when the right position becomes available.