

FIRST YEAR TEACHERS: YEARS 3 / 4

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Before the children's first day:

- Make contact with the school; arrange to visit.
- Ask for copies of the school policy and curriculum documents, samples of planning documents from previous years, etc.
- Obtain a class list and any records of student learning that have been collected over previous years (digital portfolios, cumulative files, etc.). Ascertain students who are ESL learners, have special learning needs, etc. Seek additional advice/resources for supporting these students.
- Check the arrangements for the beginning of school year:
 - what classroom resources are students allocated?
 - what classroom resources are you able to use?
 - what timetable arrangements need to be accommodated?
- Find out if you will be part of a teaching team who plan together and whether you will have a mentor.
- Arrange to get into your classroom a day or two before the children's school year begins.
- Gather together resources that will support your teaching in the first weeks (resources for reading/writing, mathematics, science, ICT, etc.).

Setting up your classroom (involve the students in many aspects of the classroom design in order to foster a sense of shared ownership)

- Ensure your classroom is an interesting place to enter.
- Display a large welcome sign (written in English and all other languages of the school community).
- Ensure the class meeting place is big enough for all children to sit together comfortably. Perhaps you can find several comfortable old lounge chairs or a couch to mark a boundary for the meeting space.
- Arrange for student seating that facilitates cooperative learning opportunities.
- Create some distinct areas: computer area, classroom library, science/mathematics resource area, writing area.
- Establish a classroom library that encourages wide reading (include rich picture books, novels, non-fiction books, magazines, graphic novels, books in languages other than English, plan to include books produced by the students, etc.). To guide your selection, download the *Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge* "100 most read books Year 3/4" or other lists from: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/prc/books/default.htm>
- Set up areas for shared classroom resources: writing equipment (pencils, markers, fine-tipped pens, paper of different sizes, colours, lined/unlined), art materials, reference tools (dictionaries, thesauruses, atlases).

The First Day

- Warmly welcome students as they arrive.
- Orient students to an organised area where they can deposit bags, hats and jackets and where they can store materials they have brought to school (in tubs they can creatively label, for instance).
- Engage with parents as they drop students off at school. Be ready to note important information you might be told about:
 - students' medical/dietary needs;
 - after-care, after school arrangements (pick-ups, sibling responsibilities, etc.).
- Encourage students to explore the classroom library you have set up as they arrive/while parents inform you of their children's needs.
- Commence with an initial meeting with students: in the classroom meeting area, welcomes, introductions, initial explanations of classroom organisation and class protocols.
- Introduce key classroom expectations that need to be stated from the beginning of the year.
- Aim to get a sense of the students as individual learners: their interests, goals, reading preferences, likes/dislikes, etc.
- Take photos of the children: these can be made into a classroom portrait gallery with captions about each student.
- Ensure students are read to and get the opportunity to read independently (this can become a daily expectation).
- Ensure you model writing for the students, supporting them with writing something on this first day (a copy of which could be made for your assessment purposes).
- Begin to establish classroom monitors for responsibilities like lunch orders, messages, maintaining classroom library, etc. Emphasise everyone is responsible for a happy, safe and productive classroom where everyone can learn.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY ON THE FIRST DAY

9.00	CLASS MEETING: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce yourself to the class. Share a memory you have about being in Year 3/4 (show a photograph of you at Year 3/4 age). Emphasise you want the year to be one where they really enjoy school and learn lots of new things. Ask students to share some of the things they would like to learn this year. Highlight that a safe and happy classroom for learning is essential.• Form groups of four. Ask students to brainstorm onto chart paper the ways that they think the classroom could be a safe and happy place for learning.• Share these and build up a class list. Highlight the ways, as their teacher, you need to ensure you are supporting their learning. You might like to emphasise:	If possible, allow access to the classroom from about 8.45 am, enabling you to meet and greet students (and parents) as they arrive at school. Parents will often arrive at these times if they have important issues to discuss with the class teacher.
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11:30	<p>WRITING FOCUS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to the students that you want to learn about your new students as quickly as possible, so are going to ask them to write a little about themselves. • Brainstorm the sorts of information they might put into a piece of autobiographical writing: where they were born, who is in their family, pets, friends, interests, special moments, etc. • Demonstrate how you expect the students to go about this by engaging in some modelled writing about yourself. Model both authorial and secretarial aspects of writing: what you'll write first, strategies for spelling, punctuating, etc. • Some students might like to share the writing they did with others: pairs, small groups or the whole class. • Collect students' first drafts of this personal writing as examples of first day writing – use to guide further instruction. 	<p>Analyse students' writing; note skills/needs in areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text Type • Meaning • Structure • Grammar • Punctuation • Handwriting • Spelling
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The First Weeks

Aim for each student to:

- Have a happy introduction to learning in Year 3/4.
- Feel socially connected with other class members and with you as the class teacher.
- Be engaged with meaningful opportunities for reading, writing, viewing, speaking and listening.
- Be introduced to rich texts that facilitate critical and creative engagement and response.

Aim to:

- Collect authentic assessment data to inform your literacy instruction. This could be obtained through:
 - focussed observation of students' engagement with reading, writing, speaking and listening tasks;
 - analysis of work samples (students' writing, responses to reading, etc.);
 - student self assessments: ascertain their perceived areas of strength and need, goals they would like to work towards, etc.;
 - formal assessments as determined by teaching teams within the school (this might be an area you have little room to negotiate around – but be aware that students new to a class and its teacher might not perform to their best in test-like' conditions).
- Support student learning through appropriate levels of teacher demonstration and modelling of reading interests and behaviours, writing strategies, listening and speaking skills.

- Ensure students take risks with their learning: that, despite the likelihood of errors, they know they will develop new skills and understandings by trying to read different types of texts, attempting longer pieces of writing, verbally reporting on ideas to new audiences, etc.
- Provide opportunities for students to learn in whole class, small group and individual contexts. Forming small groups according to learning needs, interests, a mix of backgrounds/abilities, or gender differences overcomes issues of groups being seen by students as linked solely to ability.
- Plan for opportunities for students to become more powerful:
 - text decoders/encoders;
 - text participants/meaning makers;
 - text users;
 - text analysts. (see Freebody and Luke, 1990).

References

Freebody, Peter (1990)

http://www.myread.org/readings_freebody.htm

Freebody, P. & Luke, A. (1990). 'Literacies' programmes: debates and demands in cultural context.' *Prospect: a Journal of Australian TESOL* 11, 7-16.