

# 7 Habits of Amazing Student Teachers

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In some former life, I must have done something amazingly heroic, like help catalyze women's suffrage or invent pizza or something. I know this because I've had two student teachers so far, and they've both been the most wonderful, most helpful, most EVERYTHING student teachers ever. I would love to take credit for any part of their success, but I know I had nothing to do with it. If anything, all I contributed to was signing forms late and giving them stories to go home and tell their families. ("Today my supervising teacher walked around for an entire class period with a piece of melted chocolate on her neck. She kept asking why it smelled like cookies. I didn't have the heart to tell her.").

Anyway, I decided to put together a list of characteristics and qualities that I've noticed in my student teachers: things that have made their time in my classroom beneficial to them and to me. Whether you're about to be a student teacher yourself, or are about to be a mentor teacher and want to share this list with your newbie, here is a list of characteristics of things I have noticed my awesome student teachers have in abundance.

**1. They take opportunities to be helpful instead of waiting to be told what to do.** Don't get me wrong: There's nothing impolite or unhelpful about asking, "What would you like me to do now?" but there is something incredible about realizing my student teacher has anticipated and met a need without me even addressing it. Sometimes when I zone out or get bogged down with one of my 2,045,778 emails, I'll look up and my student teacher will be doing something I didn't ask her to do but is totally wonderful, like straightening the bookshelves or supply closet, cleaning off desks, or organizing the mountain of papers threatening to take over my back table.

**2. They say goodbye to their comfort zones.** Student teaching is scary, y'all. It's like meeting your future spouse and their 120 children for the first time ... on the day of your wedding. We all have limits on what we are and aren't comfortable with (and it's important that both the student teacher and mentor teacher share and understand these), but good student teachers know that there is no better time to fail or make a fool of yourself than now, in a controlled environment with support from the mentor teacher.

**3. They share ideas.** Student teaching is not (or at least should not) be a one-way street where the supervising teacher simply tells the student teacher what to do the whole semester. Personally, I'm so grateful for my student teachers' fresh lesson-plan ideas and new ways of doing things, and I know my students are too.

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**4. They are direct but kind.** One of my favorite things about my student teachers has been that they respect me enough to let me know about their needs and suggestions directly and in a kind way. Just before break, my student teacher said some version of, "I would really like to know more about your planning process—can you show me more of that next semester?" I loved that she let me know this directly instead of going the rest of the year wishing things were different, or worse, going into next year not knowing how to plan a unit because her mentor teacher would go into a silent, scary Planning Trance at her computer.

**5. They embrace the grunt work.** I think I've made it clear that I'm not a supporter of the king-servant ideology regarding the student teaching experience. But that being said, I think it would be a disservice to the student teacher to let them think that teaching is purely lesson plans and classroom management. My student teachers have been absolutely amazing about helping me make copies, grade, move furniture and do other odd jobs when asked—and with smiles on their faces! (I have no idea who they learned that from. I walk down the hall on Monday mornings singing loudly in a minor key.)

**6. They welcome feedback—positive and critical.** Everyone loves positive feedback—that's easy. But what's trickier is accepting and welcoming critical feedback. Good student teachers interpret critical feedback as opportunities for growth, not reasons to slash the tires of their mentor teacher.

**7. They are flexible.** I remember being frustrated as a student teacher when my mentor teacher would tell me I had a certain amount of time to teach a lesson or unit and then suddenly change the amount of time at the last minute. Now, with a few years under my belt, I know that's just the nature of the beast. It's rare for any teacher to always have more than a few days' notice about field trips, schedule changes, assemblies and other things that affect lesson/unit planning. Both of my student teachers have been so flexible with last-minute changes, which is not only a relief to me, but is good practice for the unpredictable world of teaching in which they are making their first steps.

As you can see, I've had some pretty outstanding student teachers to be able to create this list. Sometimes I think they could even be superhuman. I'll check their stomachs for belly buttons next time I see them.