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*Strategies
to Problem-Solve
the Hard Parts
of Teaching*

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the
new
teacher
handbook

BERIT GORDON

STUDY GUIDE

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The New Teacher Handbook

The Low-Read Summer Book Club Guide

This study guide will help you turn *The New Teacher Handbook* from “just another teaching book” into a trusted mentor and a first-year survival kit. It provides a road map for organizing a summer book club that boosts teacher preparation, reduces stress, and minimizes reading time. It won’t demand cover-to-cover reading. You’ll find exactly what you need when you need it.

See how to structure a summer book study with five possible meeting outlines, with each session lasting about sixty minutes. If your time is limited, go to the “Alternative Schedules” section at the end of this guide for two to three meeting options; you can also omit some activities as you go. You can also extend these meetings into the school year for ongoing support during those first months. New teachers will need it then, too!

*There will be another version of this guide in August 2025 for a school-year book club.

For Group Leaders

In meetings, you’ll help teachers find exactly what they need in the handbook. The session plans include activities, discussion prompts, and quick exercises that turn abstract teaching advice into concrete classroom tools. While specific strategies and activities are suggested, you can pick and choose what works for your group, swapping out strategies so your new teachers get what they need.

This summer book club will create those “I’m not alone!” moments that new teachers crave. Share your own teaching disaster stories, bring snacks, and make it safe to admit when you’re struggling. These book club meetings give new

teachers confidence in starting the year, practical strategies to implement, and the comfort of knowing where to turn when facing the inevitable challenges of being a new teacher.

For the New Teacher

Here's what this book club will do for you:

- It will get you ready to face teaching challenges with simple solutions that you'll have at hand when you need them—no panicked Googling at midnight!
- It will help you create your personal teacher toolbox of go-to strategies you've already tried out before day one.
- It will give you specific words, actions, and clear examples for those “What do I do when?” moments.
- It will connect you with fellow teachers who'll share their best tricks (and mistakes).

Meeting 1: Getting to Know Your Handbook (60 minutes)

Group leader: Before starting any book-related activities, look at the following strategies: Strategy 2.1: “What introductory activities can help students feel comfortable in my class and with one another?” Strategy 2.4: “How important are names? And how do I learn them all?” And Strategy 4.2: “How can the first three minutes welcome students in and build community?” Swap out any of the following activities for these essential community-building steps for your group unless they have met before and know each other fairly well.

Opening Activity: Explore the Book (10 minutes)

1. Give copies of the handbook to all participants.
Have them write their name in the inside cover.
2. Ask everyone to take five minutes to silently browse the book, however they choose.

3. Facilitate a quick share-out:

- + “Which chapter title caught your attention?”
- + “What strategy question feels relevant to you?”
- + “What surprised you about the organization of the book?”

Handbook Tour (15 minutes)

1. Walk participants through the book’s key components:

- + Show how the table of contents (pages v–x) follows a strategic progression, starting with teacher well-being, moving to classroom management, then building relationships, planning, and assessment. The early chapters create foundations for the later ones.
- + Flip through Chapter 1 and highlight how it addresses specific teaching challenges with practical steps and strategies. Point out that each strategy title is a real question asked by actual new teachers.
- + Go to pages 4–5 of the introduction to understand all the components of a strategy. Then, examine a chapter strategy together, for example, Strategy 2.4: “How important are names? And how do I learn them all?” Point out:
 - » Strategy question title that reflects real teacher concerns
 - » “At a glance” section for quick implementation
 - » “Digging deeper” explanation for when you have more time
 - » “It’s working if” indicators to measure success

2. Demonstrate the three types of resources by looking at:

- + Strategy 1.1: “How do I manage the workload if I never feel done?” (watch the “Get It Quick” video)
- + Strategy 2.7: “How do I get students settled and ready to learn (or follow any routine)?” (watch the “Demo” video)
- + Strategy 3.7: “How do I change the dynamic with an angry student?” (review the “What to Say” resource)

Honest Expectations Activity (15 minutes)

1. Complete these sentences on index cards:
 - + “My biggest teaching worry is _____.”
 - + “I hope I never have to handle _____.”
 - + “I can’t wait to _____.”
2. Mix up the cards and redistribute them.
3. Read the card you received aloud.
4. Group leader: “Let’s find where this handbook addresses that.”

Understanding the Checklists (15 minutes)

1. Turn to the “Growth at a Glance” checklists in the introduction (pages 10–17). Review how the checklists can guide you:
 - + These checklists correspond to each chapter in the book and show teaching skills that build on each other. For example, checklists start with taking care of yourself (1), then classroom management (2–4), then relationships (5). Each chapter builds on skills from previous ones. It’s hard to build relationships before you have basic management, or to give feedback (7) before students can work for a bit on their own (6).
 - + Participants don’t have to go in order, but if a new teacher is struggling, starting with earlier checklists and chapters will set them up for the most success.
2. Review this step-by-step guide to using the checklists for when teachers use the book later:
 - + Check off what you do consistently, not just on a great day.
 - + Find the first checklist or goal with several blank boxes. That’s a good place to start.
 - + Dip into that corresponding chapter and put a sticky note on a few strategies that will help.
 - + Later, when you see that you can now check off some of those boxes, celebrate! It’s crucial to mark growth!
 - + Decide if you want to stay in that goal or move to a new one.

By using this approach, you'll not only feel accomplished instead of overwhelmed, but also you'll build skills in a way that sets you up for quick wins and growth.

Closing (5 minutes)

- Preview the next meeting: "Next time we'll dive deeper into taking care of yourself and preview classroom management strategies."
- Consider setting up a group text for sharing questions or small victories between sessions.
- If they're interested, suggest browsing Chapters 1 and 2 before you meet again, but emphasize that no preparation is required.
- Close with this reminder: "Remember, this handbook is a tool kit. There's no homework to complete!"

Group Leader Notes

- If conversation lags, tell them about a time you wished you'd had this book in your first year. Share an embarrassing or difficult moment from your early teaching when you had to figure things out alone. Look at Berit's examples at the start of the introduction for inspiration.
- Bring colorful sticky tabs so people can mark handbook pages they want to go back to later.

Meeting 2: Taking Care of You (Chapter 1) and Starting Classroom Management (Chapter 2) (55 minutes)

Opening Activity: Self-Care Inventory (10 minutes)

1. Look at the Chapter 1 checklist items you explored last time.
2. On a sticky note, write:
 - + One way you can already maintain your energy during the school week
 - + One professional habit you want to develop this year
 - + Your biggest time or energy drain during the school day
3. Share in groups of three to four, then look for matching strategies in Chapter 1.

Group Leader Notes

- Share your own energy-saving strategy and a professional habit you're working on.
- Emphasize that teacher sustainability is the foundation for everything else.
- Connect responses to specific strategies in Chapter 1.

Strategy Deep Dive: Time Management (20 minutes)

1. Open to Strategy 1.3: "How much time should I budget to stay on top of things?"
2. Watch the quick video together.

3. Create your ideal weekly work schedule:

- + When will you arrive/leave school?
- + What days will you tackle specific tasks?
- + How do you protect time to prepare for an effective teaching day and time to recharge?

Example of My Realistic Schedule:

Monday: Planning day, stay till 5 pm

Tuesday: Make copies early, leave on time

Wednesday: Faculty meeting, then gym and home

Thursday: Grade during prep, feedback, and organize till 5

Friday: Tidy room, prep for Monday, out by 4. Friends meet up

Weekend: Max 3 hours Sunday (streaming shows the rest!)

Group Leader Notes

- Share your actual schedule. Not a perfect one.
- Tell the truth about times you overworked and regretted it.

Partner Activity: "When Teaching Gets Rough" (15 minutes)

1. Read Strategy 1.10 about getting to work on hard days.
2. With a partner, create a personalized "Tough Day Plan":
 - + Three small actions to restore your energy (example: "Order pizza, wear comfy shoes, go to bed by 9")
 - + An emergency lesson plan (example: "Writing prompt + silent reading time + review games")
 - + Your go-to pep talk (example: "I can do anything for 45 minutes")

Preview: Getting to a Well-Managed Class Without a Lot of Management (5 minutes)

1. Have the group browse Chapter 2's table of contents.
2. Ask: "Which management strategy title speaks to your biggest worry?"
3. Mark those pages with colorful tabs for next time.

Closing (5 minutes)

- Read Strategy 1.2 about ending days feeling accomplished.
- Make a group list: "What counts as a teaching win?" People can also share something they did today that helped them or their students.
- Preview next meeting: "Next time we'll focus on classroom management strategies from Chapter 2."

Meeting 3: Creating a Well-Managed Classroom (60 minutes)

Opening Activity: Management Questions and Worries (15 minutes)

1. Write your two biggest classroom management questions on sticky notes.
2. Post them on your "Wall of Worries."
3. Group similar questions together.
4. Dip into Chapters 2 to 4 to find strategies that answer these questions. Put sticky notes on strategies you want to return to. (Point out that while today focuses on Chapter 2, all three chapters support a well-managed classroom.)

Group Leader Notes

- Share a story: “My biggest management disaster was when I tried to _____.”
- Point out that Chapter 2 focuses on preventing problems before they start. Discuss the concepts in (or read together) the introduction to Chapter 2.

First Day Planning Workshop (15 minutes)

1. Talk about a time when you walked into a new place or situation, were introduced to others, and got to know them. Share how that felt. Or share out if the opposite happened, and you didn't know anyone, and how that felt. Teachers can share out, too. Discuss the importance of students knowing one another in order to feel safe coming into our classrooms.
2. Read Strategy 2.1: “What introductory activities can help students feel comfortable in my class and with one another?” Watch the demo video for their appropriate grade level.
3. Try one of the introductory activities as a group now. If teachers know of other introductory activities and want to “teach” them to the group, encourage them!
4. Have teachers choose introductory activities for their first days of school, using the strategy to help. Share out.

Creating Essential Procedures (20 minutes)

1. Share a time when you walked into a new situation and knew just what to do, where to go, and what to say. Or share the opposite. How did you feel? Ask teachers if they have experiences to share. Discuss the importance of establishing routines and procedures early on and making sure students know these well.
2. Look at Strategy 2.2: “I’ve heard it’s important to get routines and procedures in place. What does that mean?”
3. Divide into pairs and have them brainstorm the various procedures they’ll want to teach in the first weeks of school. Encourage them to generate a detailed list. Share out. People can add anything to their own list.

4. Then, have them choose one essential procedure, such as:
 - + Getting students' attention
 - + Transitions between activities
 - + Distributing and collecting materials
 - + Getting help during independent work
 - + Using the bathroom/water fountain
5. Each pair creates a series of steps that will teach the routine. If they feel comfortable, have them "teach" the rest of the group.

Follow-Up Video (5 minutes)

- Show the demo video for Strategy 2.11: "How can I get students to follow routines without reminders?" for reinforcement techniques. "What did you notice? What will you try?"

Closing (5 minutes)

- Share one takeaway from today's session.
- Preview next meeting: "Next time we'll focus on strategies for responding to challenging behaviors from Chapter 3."
- Suggest browsing Chapter 3 if interested, but no preparation is required.

● Meeting 4: Responding to ● Challenging Behaviors (Chapter 3) ● (60 minutes)

Opening Activity: Behavior Scenarios (15 minutes)

1. On index cards, write brief scenarios of challenging student behaviors:
 - + “A student loudly says, ‘This is stupid’ during your lesson.”
 - + “Two students keep whispering and giggling during work time.”
 - + “A student puts their head down and refuses to participate.”
 - + “A student consistently calls out answers without raising their hand.”
2. Form small groups and distribute scenarios.
3. Groups have five minutes to find strategies in Chapter 3 that address their scenario.
4. Share approaches with the whole group.

Group Leader Notes

- Highlight Strategy 3.2: “What are quick strategies for a student who is off task or refuses to do the work?” to establish a mindset of curiosity rather than frustration, and to say less (in the moment) for best results.

Managing Your Emotions Workshop (15 minutes)

1. Read Strategy 3.1: “How can I regulate my emotions when student behaviors test me?”
2. Watch the video for this strategy.
3. Discuss moves to regulate your emotions before trying to manage students.
4. Create a personal “Reset Button” technique you can use in ten seconds or less.

Group Leader Notes

- Share your own authentic reset button technique.
- Remind everyone that their emotional regulation is contagious in the classroom, and that students are unlikely to comply until they are emotionally regulated.

Response Strategies Role-Play (20 minutes)

1. Read Strategy 3.7: “How do I change the dynamic with an angry student?”
2. Form groups of three: Student, Teacher, Observer.
3. Role-play these scenarios, practicing the language from the handbook:
 - + A student refuses to start work
 - + A student makes a disrespectful comment
 - + A student is distracting others
4. After each role-play, the Observer gives feedback on:
 - + What went well in the teacher’s response
 - + What impact did it have on the “student”
 - + One suggestion to try next time

Group Leader Notes

- Encourage natural language that fits each teacher’s style.
- Point out Strategy 3.9: “How do I shut down the behavior, not the student?”
- Highlight Strategy 3.11: “How can consequences work to improve behavior?” for follow-up. Discuss logical consequences and what they look like.

Closing (10 minutes)

- Review the “It’s working if” indicators from the strategies covered.
- Share one approach that participants feel most confident trying.
- Preview next meeting: “Next time we’ll explore building relationships with students and families from Chapter 4.”

● Meeting 5: Building Relationships ● (Chapter 4) (60 minutes)

Opening Activity: Relationship Comfort Zones (15 minutes)

1. Create a tape line across the floor that's labeled "Super Comfortable" on one end and "Totally Terrified" on the other end.
2. Read these scenarios aloud:
 - + "Talking one-on-one with a shy student"
 - + "Calling a parent about behavior issues"
 - + "Handling conflict between students"
 - + "Building trust with a kid who hates school"
3. Stand where you fall on the comfort line for each.
4. Discuss the scenarios, why it's normal to feel uncomfortable with any of them, and then encourage teachers to look in Chapter 4 for strategies to increase their comfort level.

Group Leader Notes

- Stand on the line yourself for each scenario.
- Help them connect specific handbook strategies to each comfort level. If you have more time, ask them to suggest other scenarios they might worry about.

Strategy Application: Building Trust (15 minutes)

1. Read Strategy 4.4: "How do I build trust, especially with resistant and challenging students?"
2. Read the "What to Say" resource on page 133, and encourage teachers to browse other strategies in the chapter.

3. Have teachers share out ideas for building trust with:
 - + Your whole class community
 - + That one challenging student you expect
 - + The quietest kids who might get overlooked
 - + Look at strategies throughout the chapter to build connections and trust with every student, and also among students. This cannot be overdone.

Family Communication Templates (15 minutes)

1. Read Strategy 5.1: “How do I connect with families and gain their trust and support?”
2. Work on one or two of these essential communication templates:
 - + A welcome email or letter
 - + A positive call-home script that’s quick and specific
 - + A “discussing a concern” conversation starter
3. Share with a partner and get feedback

Group Leader Notes

- Show examples that hit different tones (formal, warm, brief).
- Share a story about how family partnerships helped you and your students.

Support Circle and Ongoing Connection (15 minutes)

1. Sit in a circle and each person shares:
 - + “One thing I’m taking from this book club is _____.”
 - + “I’m still nervous about _____.”
 - + “I can help others with _____.”
2. Plan for ongoing support:
 - + Schedule monthly mini-sessions during the school year.
 - + Set up a digital sharing space for struggles and victories.
 - + Exchange contact information.
 - + Decide which chapter to explore next as a group.

Alternative Schedules

If You Only Have Time for Three Meetings (60 minutes each)

Meeting 1: Book Overview and Teacher Well-Being

- 20 minutes: Book exploration and tour (including Strategy 1.3: “How much time should I budget to stay on top of things?” to show strategy components)
- 15 minutes: Understanding the “Growth at a Glance” checklists and how to use them
- 25 minutes: Strategy 1.3 application—creating realistic weekly work schedules that protect boundaries

Meeting 2: Classroom Management Foundations

- 15 minutes: Management questions brainstorm and finding solutions in Chapters 2–3
- 25 minutes: First day planning workshop using Strategy 2.1: “What introductory activities can help students feel comfortable in my class and with one another?”

- 15 minutes: Essential procedures planning using Strategy 2.2: “I’ve heard it’s important to get routines and procedures in place. What does that mean?”
- 5 minutes: Closing and preview

Meeting 3: Relationships and Ongoing Support

- 25 minutes: Strategy 4.4: “How do I build trust, especially with resistant and challenging students?”—creating month-one trust-building plans
- 20 minutes: Problem-solving practice with challenging behavior scenarios from Chapter 3
- 15 minutes: Support circle and ongoing connection plans for school year

If You Only Have Time for Two Meetings (90 minutes each)

Meeting 1: Book Overview and Survival Strategies

- 30 minutes: Book exploration and tour
- 15 minutes: Checklist exploration
- 25 minutes: Strategy 1.3: “How much time should I budget to stay on top of things?” activity
- 15 minutes: Strategy 1.10: “How do I get myself off my sofa and to work when I’m desperate for a day off?” activity
- 5 minutes: Closing and preview

Meeting 2: Classroom Readiness and Relationship Building

- 30 minutes: First day planning using Strategy 2.1: “What introductory activities can help students feel comfortable in my class and with one another?”
- 25 minutes: Strategy 4.4: “How do I build trust, especially with resistant and challenging students?” activity
- 25 minutes: Problem-solving with scenarios from Chapter 3
- 10 minutes: Support circle and ongoing connection plans

If You Can't Meet: Minimal Support Options

When you have zero time for meetings but want to support your new teachers beyond just handing them the book.

The Email Check-In Approach (5 minutes of prep, maximum impact)

Week 1 Email: “Welcome to our informal summer book ‘club’! No meetings, no pressure, just some gentle support as you prep for fall. Take 10 minutes this week to flip to the ‘Growth at a Glance’ checklist on page 10 (Chapter 1 goals). How are you doing with taking care of yourself? Any goal jump out as worth focusing on? Hit reply and let me know—I’d love to hear from you!”

Weekly Email Template (rotate through chapters): “Quick check-in: How’s Goal [#] going from the Chapter [#] checklist? Try Strategy [#.#]: ‘[Strategy title]’ this week. The video is especially helpful! Any wins or struggles to share?”

Sample 8-Week Summer Series

- **Week 1:** Chapter 1 checklist introduction
- **Week 2:** Strategy 1.3 + video (“How much time should I budget to stay on top of things?”)
- **Week 3:** Strategy 2.1 + video (“What introductory activities can help students feel comfortable in my class and with one another?”)
- **Week 4:** Strategy 2.4 + phonetic name practice (“How important are names? And how do I learn them all?”)
- **Week 5:** Strategy 3.1 + video (“How can I regulate my emotions when student behaviors test me?”)
- **Week 6:** Strategy 4.2 + video (“How can the first three minutes welcome students in and build community?”)
- **Week 7:** Strategy 5.1 (“How do I connect with families and gain their trust and support?”)
- **Week 8:** “You’ve got this! Which strategy has been most helpful? Ready for an amazing year!”

Making This Book Work All Year

Monthly Mini-Sessions

- Quick 30-minute video chats
- Everyone brings one current struggle
- Use the handbook together to find solutions

Celebration System

- Create a group chat or digital space
- Post wins based on “It’s working if” indicators
- Cheer each other on with specific praise

Chapter Focus Months

- Pick one handbook chapter each month
- Try strategies from that area
- Share what worked and what you modified

COMING AUGUST 2025

A companion guide specifically designed for school-year book clubs will be available, featuring meeting structures that address the evolving needs of new teachers as they navigate their first months in the classroom.