



Teacher Substitute Handoff Kit

A reusable starting point for elementary teachers. Adapt routines to your school.

A clear start. A smoother handoff.

Set up the information that stays steady once. Then update the date, schedule changes, and lesson priorities for each absence. The goal is to make the next step easy to find.

KEEP TWO LAYERS

BASE PACKET: classroom routines, materials locations, school contacts, and approved procedure references. TODAY'S INSERT: date, changed times, lesson directions, materials, and work to collect.

1. Build the quick-start page

Use page 3. Ask a colleague to locate the first activity and support contact without asking you.

2. Add one lesson card per block

Copy page 4 as needed. Page 2 shows the detail a substitute can actually use.

3. Include a backup and a return note

Page 5 is a paper-and-pencil activity for grades 3-5. Page 6 closes the loop on the day.

CHECK BEFORE EACH USE

Update changed routines and contacts. Arrange authorized access to student support plans, attendance, emergency procedures, and dismissal instructions. Keep passwords and sensitive student details out of this general handout.



Worked example: the first lesson

Fictional grade 4 example. Names, room details, and times are illustrative.

A VAGUE NOTE

"Do reading. Papers are on the desk. Finish early? Read quietly."

A HANDOFF SOMEONE CAN FOLLOW

9:00-9:30 | Reading: explain a character's choice using evidence. Materials: copied story and response sheet in the tray labeled READING; teacher key clipped behind the master. No device needed.

9:00-9:03 | Start

Say: "Today we will explain why a character made a choice. We will point to a detail in the story that supports our thinking." Read the opening paragraph aloud.

9:03-9:13 | Read

Students read the rest independently or follow the approved support arrangement. Ask: "What choice did the character make? What detail helps explain it?"

9:13-9:23 | Respond

Students complete the response sheet. Model the frame: "The character chose ____ because _____. One detail is _____." Accept the response format arranged by the teacher.

9:23-9:30 | Check and collect

Invite two volunteers to share evidence. Collect sheets in the READING tray. Note whether most responses included a story detail; leave unfinished work together.

If plans change: use the teacher-approved backup on page 5. If materials or access are missing, contact the designated colleague or office. Do not improvise account access.



Quick start: read this first

Keep with the base packet. Update the date and any changes for each absence.

Teacher / room: _____ Date: _____

Grade / class: _____ Last checked: _____

1. Before students arrive

Where to find today's timetable, lesson cards, materials, and the first activity.

2. Who can help?

Office contact and approved contact method; nearby colleague and room; technology support route.

3. Routines that matter today

Attention cue, supplies, transitions, restroom process, and cleanup. Attach the full timetable.

4. Changes, duties, and dismissal

List changed times and duties. Identify where authorized dismissal instructions are provided.

5. Required school information

Where authorized staff provide attendance, emergency procedures, and individual support information.



Today's lesson card

Copy for each lesson or class period. Keep the directions short and specific.

Time / subject: _____ Materials location: _____

Learning goal and what to collect

What should students learn or practice? Which work should be saved, and where?

Start: say or show this

Include a short opening prompt, worked example, or exact page / task to start.

Work time: steps and timing

Describe the task order, grouping, checkpoints, and teacher-approved support arrangements.

Finish: check and transition

How to check understanding, collect work, put materials away, and begin the next block.

If time or materials change

Name a shorter version, approved early-finisher task, and backup materials location.



Backup activity: design a helpful tool

Grades 3-5 | About 15-20 minutes | Paper and pencils | Teacher approval before use

THE CHALLENGE

Invent a tool that helps with an ordinary classroom task: organizing supplies, carrying books, or keeping a desk tidy. Draw it, label its parts, and explain how it helps. This is a drawing activity; no building supplies or devices are needed.

2 minutes | Choose

Ask: "What small classroom task could be easier?" Students choose one task. Model an idea: a divided tray that keeps pencils from mixing with erasers.

7 minutes | Sketch

Draw the tool and label at least three useful parts. Younger writers may use short labels or explain orally through an approved classroom arrangement.

4 minutes | Explain

Complete: "My tool helps with _____. The _____ part works by _____. One change I would try is _____."

3 minutes | Share and check

Invite volunteers to describe one useful feature. Look for a clear task, labeled parts, and an explanation linking the design to the task. No single design is the correct answer.

IF YOU HAVE FIVE MORE MINUTES

Add a constraint: your tool must fit in a desk drawer. Students revise one feature and explain the tradeoff. For a shorter version, draw one feature and complete only the first sentence.

Use the established support plans and classroom routines. Keep this option behind the assigned lesson.



End-of-day note: close the loop

Leave in the teacher's designated location. Use school reporting channels for urgent concerns.

Date / class: _____ Substitute: _____

Completed / unfinished / work location

List the lesson or task, where students stopped, and where collected work can be found.

Learning to revisit

Describe a task or concept that needed more practice. Keep sensitive individual details in approved systems.

What helped the day work?

Useful routines, successful activities, and practical notes for the next absence.

Follow-up already routed

Record the appropriate contact or approved record reference; do not repeat confidential details here.

Reset for the next absence

Teacher: review unfinished work, update any confusing directions, restock copies, and check that the base packet still matches current routines.

Background: [NEA, How Can I Set Up My Sub for Success? \(2019\)](#) | Accessed October 14, 2026.

Original Commerce Street Cares tools; not an NEA form or endorsement. Use school-approved access methods.