



Teaching is hard work. Today's teachers should turn summer vacation into an opportunity to prepare for the next academic year.

Take stock. It is critical to reflect on the year you've just completed. If you've kept a journal, go over your entries to find the lessons that seemed less successful or that presented important challenges for you or your students. Think about what went wrong or what factors you failed to anticipate well. Should some of these lessons be jettisoned completely? Are some salvageable with additional research or planning?

2 Assess your assessments. How did grading and evaluation go this year? Was student success difficult to assess for some lessons or projects? Did your grading system get in the way of your teaching or unfairly assess some students? Reevaluate your grading system to fix any areas or components that proved inefficient or problematic. Consider developing new rubrics for next year. Even if you prefer to develop rubrics with your class, take some time to ensure that your needs are addressed by thorough planning.

3 Explore new technologies. Your students will be entering a workplace that makes demands on them that are likely to be unfamiliar to you. Help them to prepare for life after the classroom by encouraging their use of new technologies. If your school has a website, then design a project in which students will develop a Web page for your class. Students can write blog entries for the site and develop their own process for approving and posting these messages. You may even decide to contribute occasionally. With a scanner or a digital camera, students can put art projects, homework assignments, the class syllabus, and more on the site. Attend a workshop or take a summer class to prepare, if needed. Remember, your students will likely be able to teach you a few things too. With a Web page for your class, students can take pride in both their academic work and their online presence. This type of project can have the added benefit of enhanced parent and community involvement.

4 Explore globalization and culture. Each year, the world seems to get a little smaller. Our students must learn how they fit into a world of multinational corporations and a nation of shifting demographics. Look at your course requirements and lessons. Where does your teaching touch on issues of language, cultural understanding, and international politics? Ask yourself how you could improve students' ability to expand their cultural horizons. Consider the students in your school. Have you shaped your lessons in ways that reflect an appreciation of all of the ethnic and cultural groups in your community? Invite diverse members of the community to contribute to next year's lessons. Consider cross-cultural lessons such as a sister school in another country. Be open to ideas your students may bring to class, and leave time in your schedule to encourage this exploration, if possible.

5 Pursue collaboration. You have just concluded a year of working down the hall from a variety of professionals at different stages in their careers. Consider what one or more of these educators could bring to your classroom. What areas of expertise could you offer to them? Explore opportunities to model good workplace collaboration for your students while offering them knowledge and insight beyond your areas of strength. Such collaboration also can be a great teaching and learning experience for you. You can design a project that brings together math and history, literature and foreign language study, or an academic subject and a vocational area of study. Or you can collaborate on teaching in new ways within one subject area. Find an interested colleague and develop a plan for your project. If your school doesn't encourage collaboration as a rule, remember to develop a rationale for administrators. And be sure to ask for a shared free period.