

Advice for New Interns – What NOT to do as a new teacher.

Draft Version 2.

I will be covering the what NOT to do part in Chapter Two of this E-book.

Chapter One is first, because if you choose the right school, you will be so much better off. It will prevent a lot of problems later.

So... my first advice to you? Do NOT take your first job offer without thinking about it first. You have some things you must think about before accepting a teaching job. I will explain why.

Chapter One – what to look for in your new school assignment.



OK. So you are a new intern teacher. How can you pick that all-important first teaching assignment?

I was a new intern teacher recently. I believe I made some major mistakes while I was there. I also believe that I picked the wrong school for me. But later, I found that there were clues to what would happen later that I just didn't know about at the time. I have some of these clues below.

I plan to put more of these clues and suggestions in the Second Edition, so be looking for it.

I hope that this book will help other new students excel in their first job, and hold on to their dream of being a teacher.

As most things go in life, failing as a first year intern teacher is often due to a combination of things. You will make some mistakes, no doubt about it. But remember, everyone makes mistakes. If you learn from them, they can be very useful for you.

But some things, like where you intern, can make a lot of difference and can even determine whether or not you want to teach. Period. Don't set yourself up for failure. You can set yourself up for success instead by knowing what to look for, and knowing where NOT to teach, and some clues about what to look for in your new school.

This is a rough draft of what will become a longer book later.

What brand-new intern teachers need to look for in a new teaching position:

#1. Support – does your new school have a good induction system? A good induction system involves more than a day of acclimation and an introduction to your teacher associate and principal. Check the links at the bottom of this article to find out more. Read the article carefully and make sure you know what support the best schools can give.

#2. Your room: do you have a working heater and cooler, and a working telephone that you can call anyone with (any classroom) at the school? This can be crucial to student comfort and whether they want to be in your room or not. The telephone can be a lifeline. If you can't call fellow teachers, you must walk to their room to talk to them. In between classes, you may not have time. I had a phone when I was an intern teacher that would only connect to the office. When I had to connect with another teacher, or report a problem, it was often very difficult for me.



All of the other teachers had “normal” telephones that would call any room. My phone did not get fixed for me, even though I reported the problem. I could not use my cell phone because it was against the rules to use it.

My heater also did not work correctly. It was too hot, and could not be adjusted. It made the students want to cool off by opening the windows in the back of the room. This helped other students throw things out of the windows, usually my supplies.

I would say to make sure your phone and anything else that is broken is working before you start your teaching. You may also want to have this in writing at the time you sign your contract. This is totally up to you, of course.

#3. Your supervisory teacher: is your supervisory teacher or mentor available for you?

New teachers often have two mentors. The teacher's school assigns one, and the school he or she is working in assigns the other.

So even if you have been assured that you will have help with your classes, you must know that sometimes the help you will receive is not of the highest quality or quantity. There is not much you can ask to find this out. For instance, your school representative may not call or show up until much later.

You might be lucky, though, and receive your teaching school mentor quickly. This person can be a great help to you if he or she chooses to be. They may be too busy to actually be hands-on in their help, but they can give you some great advice. Try to contact your school representative early, so you can get to know him or her. This may be of great value to you, and encourage the school representative to take an interest in your welfare.

Tell your school supervisor everything of concern to you, even if you are advised not to by your other mentor. If it is something important (like being asked to leave early or something) you owe it to him or her to keep them in the loop. Hopefully, though, this will not happen to you.

Your mentor at your school might be well prepared to have you, his or her new intern, to mentor. But he or she might also be attending online school for their master's or doctorate. If so, he or she may not have time for you, especially if he or she is taking more than 3 credits. In fact, not going to school at all would be ideal for your mentor. The more available your mentor is to you, the better.



Think about this carefully. If you need help in the classroom, a super-busy mentor taking graduate classes may not be available to you as much as one who doesn't have a lot of responsibilities. Your mentor will be teaching, making lesson plans, AND doing homework for his or her classes instead of helping you if you are unlucky. Helping you will be very hard for them, but even worse for you.

I know that I was by myself in the classroom for all my classes until the very end of my semester's internship time. The only time I would see another teacher with me in my room was usually when I was being evaluated. Ack! This was not good. But my mentor did the best he could considering how busy he was.

Also: does your mentor teach in your subject area? The ideal situation would pair you with a similar teaching subject. A teacher teaching in a different subject will still be able to help you, but one who teaches what you do may have lesson plans and more to help you with.

#4. Ask if you will be required to chair a club or association. Some of these clubs require a lot of time and knowledge. Believe me, you will not have the time to do much else than take care of your classes when you are an intern. To chair a club – especially with no help - can be very detrimental to your classroom work. An assistant position for a club MIGHT be do-able, but not preferred. As an assistant or co-head of a club, the current head of the club could take you under his or her wing and teach you the ropes... but even so, consider carefully before accepting this extra duty. If at all possible, decline.

Remember: you not only have to teach a full load, BUT you must do grading (for the first time), seating charts, take attendance, etc. AND more. You must also keep a student portfolio that will be graded! You will need to have detailed lesson plans and fill out a lot of paperwork for your classes.

You will be doing this for the very first time, so of course it will probably take twice as long as it does for other teachers. You are learning, and probably will have to use the “sink or swim” method, unless you are going to check out your situation first before signing up at a school. You will not have much sleep. It could be the hardest semester of your life.



Remember, it is already hard enough being a first-year intern. You don't need a lot of extra work on top of that. Sometimes you will feel forced to do extra work. Just say no to clubs or organizations (if you can) if you want to succeed at your new job. Don't spread yourself too thin.

There will be plenty of other extra work you will be required to do anyhow, like Hall Duty, sitting in for other teachers, etc.

#5. Books and supplies. Do you have books, or will you need to “reinvent the wheel” and come up with all of your own lessons? Your fellow teachers may not want to help you or give you lesson plans. It is up to you to make sure you have this kind of support BEFORE you agree to teach at a certain school.

If you have fellow teachers that will share their lesson plans (all of them) with you, and you know this ahead of time, you can use these materials at least for your first semester or year, and save LOTS of time and headaches.

Just ask the head of your department about that. Be sure you look at the materials you will be given. Will you need to re-write them? Are they just rote memorization tests? Where is the curriculum map for your area? Will you be expected to teach more material than can be comfortably covered in one semester? If some of these answers are not what you expected, this should also be a warning sign to you.

#6. Students – do you have a good ratio in your classes of boys and girls? Around 50% of each should be your goal. If you have a preponderance of boys, your class may be harder to control. This may also be a sign of “student-dumping,” which is a current practice in some schools. This system puts hard-to-

control students all in one classroom, and assigning them to new teachers, who may not stay with the school system.

This is a great help, of course, to the teachers who are not assigned these classes, but can be death (just a figure of speech...) if you are the assigned teacher, because your career rides on being evaluated for good classroom behavior, excellent classroom skills, and good student progress. Students who want you to fail because they think that would be funny are not unknown in such classes.

#7. Ask the school if you can inspect student records. If you find that the school does not keep current records of students you will be assigned, do not accept that job. Knowing about your students can help you be a good teacher. Not knowing them does the opposite.



Ask what is in student folders. Will you be allowed to inspect them? If your interviewer says that these folders are only shown to guidance counselors, this is also a big warning flag. I was allowed to see my student folders, but there was little or no information in them about my students.

The important information, like last year's tests, grades, and any psychological information, was not in the folders. I found out later that at least two of my students had major psychological and/or criminal record problems. I suspect there were more of them I never knew about.

#8. Pretest, pretest, pretest. Being an intern teacher brings with it many responsibilities, including keeping exacting records of your teaching plans and all student progress. But don't let the heavy load of class preparation prevent you from doing what all wise new teachers should do. That is pretesting your students. Knowing where your students are starting from can make a big difference in how you approach them.

You can make your own pre-tests using questions you make up from the subjects your students will study. You can also find some pre-tests online for basic grammar, spelling, writing, and reading skills.

Some good pretest sites you can use for free are:

Prentice-Hall Diagnostic tests

http://www.prenhall.com/diagnostic_test/

Tests from the High School English site

<http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/tools/english-hs.html>

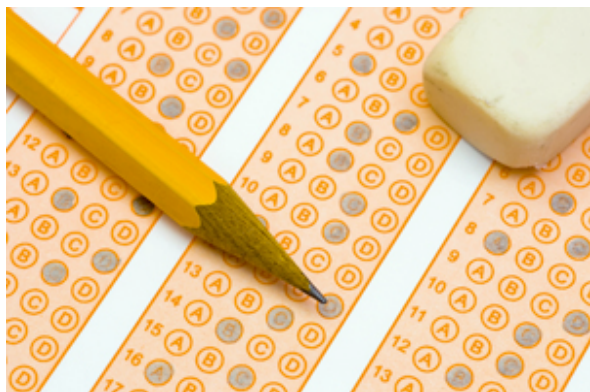
Grammar Quizzes

<http://eleaston.com/grammar-qz.html>

The VEC English Grammar Test

<https://secure.vec.bc.ca/vec/online-test.cfm?>

This test emails the student's results to them.



Grammar Pre-test for high school

<http://www.lesstutor.com/eesassesshighP.html>

(you must order the answer key here:

http://www.lesstutor.com/ltstore2.html#Hands_On_Phonics_A_-_Z)

And here is The ASSET test instrument:

<http://www.act.org/asset/tests/index.html>

This test must be done through your school.

#9. Do NOT sign anything questionable. (Like a meeting report showing you were there, when you never attended.) Even if your fellow teacher(s) or anyone else says “everyone does it,” my advice is not to sign it. I have had that happen. I would not sign the fake paper. On hindsight, I wish I had told both of my supervising teachers about it right away. I thought my “no” to that was all I needed to do.

Bad mistake. I believe that you are setting yourself up for a possible hard time from the administration (like being asked to leave) if you do not “go along” with the program. So protect yourself if this happens, and show both of your student teaching people, your mentor and your school representative any papers you have questions about.

Copy any of these you see on your copier in your classroom (have one just in case) in case the person asking you takes it with them, and denies the whole thing later. That will cover you in case something happens to you later.

#10. Do NOT rule out taking the school system to court for any kind of unfair treatment or illegal activities. Although you are an intern, you should still be treated with fairness and respect, and not threatened or treated differently than other teachers, intern or not. I decided NOT to go to (teacher) “court” over what happened to me, but you need not rule it out.

Stand up for yourself if you need to. Or just decide not to go through the drama for a year or more, as I did. It is a personal choice, of course.

You should know that despite the No Child Left Behind legislation, which has improved student help for those students with emotional or physical problems, some students are allowed to pass previous grades, even if they do not understand the material very well. These students do need special help. But (most important) there is simply not enough time for you, the new intern teacher, to help every student who has undiagnosed mental problems.



The students who have these problems will of course be frustrated at not being able to understand what you are teaching, because they are not prepared for your class, and are not getting the help that they need. And sometimes these students will take out their frustration with you by various behaviors that disrupt your class.

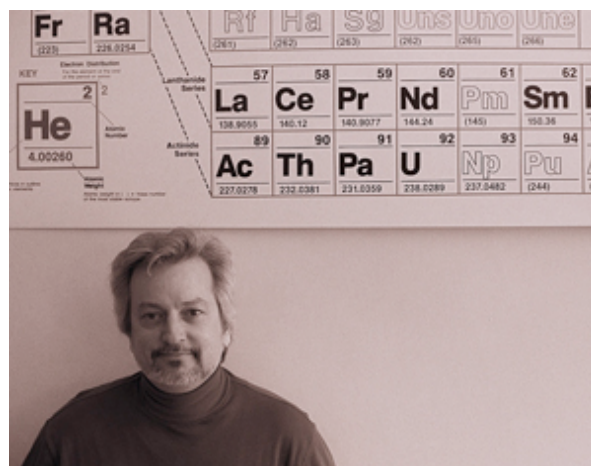
To rephrase the same point, students who receive Special Education are lucky because they can get the extra help that they need. I believe, and I am sure you do too, in helping all students to achieve their potential. All students need to be able to achieve their potential. All students are important and deserve to be well educated.

But in some schools, students who should be receiving help are not getting it. Period. They are slipping through the cracks. This might not all be the administration or other teacher's fault. It may also be partly some parents' fault, because they can refuse to have their children tested.

But if you are required to teach many students who are undiagnosed and not in special education classes, you may be asked to help these kinds of students with no assistance, special knowledge, helpful tests, extra staffing, etc. This is not only wrong on so many levels, but actually impossible and extremely unfair to ask of a new intern teacher, who has so much to learn as it is.

That is why being allowed to check your students' folders is so important. You may not be able to do this until you are employed with the school, but it is important that you do this as soon as you can. If there is nothing about the students in these folders, or if just old material is there, this is a clue that you may have some students with behavior problems in your classes. (Just a heads up...) These records are being kept somewhere; they just might not be made available to you, the teacher.

#9. Talk to other teachers. Find out why the last teacher(s) who taught your classes left or requested a change. Ask them if they received help while they were interning. Did they intern at that school, or another one?



See if you can have another teacher take students that need to have a break during your classes for whatever reason. Offer to do that for them as well. Having a backup can help a lot.

#10. Find out grade policy at your school. You may be required to “pass” all your students. The ones that do not turn in work, or do not do assignments may get zeros in your grade book, but the school policy may require that you tutor these students to get their grade up, or just give an automatic “D” or “C” for no reason because the school does not want their students to stay behind or repeat a grade.

I believe that some schools could want their problem students to graduate and get out of their schools fast, because it is easier for them. I also believe that some schools care more about their comfort zones than about the children they educate. You may be lucky and find a quality, honest, upright school that genuinely wants to do right by both their students and their new teachers. I sincerely hope you do.

#11. Get the names and/or phone numbers of teachers who have left the school, if you can. You may get some honest answers from them about problems at the school. If other teachers can’t give you any of these names, you may be able to get their stories from them.

You also might want to ask current teachers what they like and dislike about their jobs. Some teachers may not tell you anything they dislike if they are afraid you might tell somebody, though, so take what you hear with a grain of salt.

#12. Check your room setup. Are student desks set up close to your desk or wires that connect to your computer? You may want to move those desks. Guess why? Students may disconnect or play with your computer if it is too close to them.

#13. Find out how much time you have before your job starts. Do you really want to set up your room and do lesson plans “on the fly,” or would you prefer to be more organized and have more things ready when you start your teaching year? If you are a new intern, try not to take a job where you must get things ready quickly, don’t have time to set up your room and displays, and do not have time to organize your classroom.



Are you told your students' names and the classes you will teach? Make sure you have all the information you need and the time you need to get ready to teach. Of course, some new teachers will elect to take the job, no matter how much time they are allowed, just to have a job and money coming in. But think seriously about it. You may want to wait until you get a job with some "front time". It is hard enough your first, intern year without added stress.

#14. Make sure you are given what you must teach with (your books and materials) in plenty of time to use them. Some schools will tell you the books are on order and then never contact you when they come in. Other schools might give you way too much to teach over a semester. But it is possible to do everything still. It will be a challenge though. And teaching for the very first time is a great challenge already. Be sure you are ready for multiple challenges if you choose a school that is ill prepared for you and your classes.



#15. As part of your internship, you will be observed officially during your teaching time. A word of advice: find out if your computers at your chosen school regularly go down and are out of operation.

Ideally, (and I believe most schools have no computer problems like this) you should not have any computer problems on your observation days, but the school I was teaching in had a total computer breakdown school-wide on each observation day I had. This is no joke.

One day I was observed was a student presentation day, and should have been a wonderful day. Each student had a computer presentation. I was marked down (a lot!) because I had to explain to a student that he should stop trying to get the computer to work - - it was off-line, and would not be fixed. I had

already run across this same problem during my first observation. I know, this sounds hard to believe. But it really happened.

My grade for this day somehow reflected that having the computers go down was my fault. I don't know why. I was not allowed to re-schedule any of my observation days even in this case. The other days (when I was not officially observed) were usually not a problem.



You must not have this happen to you. That is why it is so important for you to know ahead of time that you have a good computer, computer backup system, and technical person working at the school. Perhaps your school does not have a good tech person or service provider. It is good to know this before you start relying on their could-be-broken system and resources. It is one thing to work with such a system as an experienced teacher, but to have to be observed and need the technology to pass your internship makes it necessary to have it working. Period.

Also, if you have this happen at every official observation, you might be marked down a lot for not having your lessons done well, especially if you have included the necessary technological aspects, such as PowerPoints, student computer presentations, or other parts of your lesson plan as your main focus.

Also, you may have to resort to another lesson plan if your computer stops working. This can add a lot of stress and cut way down on your scores too.

#16. Make sure that the Principal at your school has prior teaching experience and has been a principal for a long time. He or she simply will not understand the classroom or lesson planning otherwise. And many times, this person will be grading you and observing you, and may not really know how. You could be marked down arbitrarily.



He or she may be unnecessarily strict, an unfair grader, or simply not understand the lesson planning process, and make mistakes on the observation log that will be very unhelpful. He or she is an important part of your career, and crucially important as a helper and supporter during this time. So check out their career and information, possibly online or with a service.

#17. Make sure to join your State Teachers Union as soon as you know you will be teaching. This will help you some if anything goes wrong during your teaching time. They can go to conferences with you too. But being in this group will not necessarily help you if you have chosen an almost-impossible assignment or situation, where you have not been supported. It will be your word against theirs. Is it worth it? That is for you to decide.

That is why you must find a teaching situation with responsible, caring staff and bypass this decision altogether.

#18. Keep your first supervising teacher (the one you had while student teaching) and your former school representative on speed-dial. Ask one or the other or both what to do about grading, classroom management, etc. They are full of great ideas. Find out how many!

Chapter Two: What NOT to do as a new teacher intern – before and after being hired.

This chapter is no less important. You may choose what you think is a great school, yet you still can screw your internship up. Try following these suggestions, and you will be helping yourself a lot.

But don't worry too much. These suggestions will help you, the new intern teacher (and also the experienced teacher) achieve success, because you will not be making the same mistakes I did. Sound good?



Here are a few suggestions about how to handle some first-year situations I encountered:

#1. Never leave your class unattended, even if you are just going a couple of rooms away for a minute or two. Do not trust the students to report anything to you either. You will find many great students in your first year of teaching, but go by the “trust, but verify” system and always have a list of teachers you can call to spell you and be physically present if you must leave even for a small amount of time. Don't let yourself be liable for a student's mistake, like putting a stapler through an unrepaired hole in the floor. Yup, this happened to me. The stapler went through the hole and into another teacher's room.

There weren't students in the other classroom at the time, and I was told by the teachers, who called the principal into the classroom, that this had been going on a long time (stuff being put through the hole in the floor). They were tired of it, they said. They wanted it to stop. Of course, my students probably

weren't the only ones taking advantage of this hole in the floor. But I was the teacher that got in trouble for it.



#2. Never hang up on a students' parent, even if they swear at you, yell or call you names or accuse you of picking on their child or being a liar. (Which was not true, I should say right now.) It doesn't matter what they are saying to you.



You do not have to reply and say something you might regret. You can simply say "Oh, excuse me, I have another call. Let's talk later," or "Excuse me, I have a knock on my door. Let's talk soon."

I know, this sounds totally fake, but it is very useful.

This is also known as Good Common Sense, which obviously I didn't have at the time. I think this course of action will help you a lot.

#3. Do not eat lunch by yourself. If possible, eat with other teachers or the students. The reason for this is to stay on top of possible rumors or trouble. It gives the message "I don't like you" to other teachers if you seem not to prefer to eat with them.

Your fellow teachers don't know that you are simply trying to stuff food quickly into your mouth so you can grade papers or get ready for the next class. They may have forgotten how hard it was for them their first year.

#4. Never, never carry food on top of other food that has been wrapped in cellophane. Any food wrapped in cellophane plastic will be slippery. There is a 100 per cent chance it will fall on the way to your classroom, probably in the main cafeteria. You might even do it twice. Believe me, this is not fun, and pretty embarrassing. You are forewarned.



#5. Get as much candy and cookies or other snacks as you can, and bring it regularly to school for your students. I think I should have tried this, on hindsight. It couldn't have hurt, anyway. You may as well try it and see. One teacher I observed used candy as a reward and tossed it to the students. It seemed to work. So try it and see. Choose healthy kinds of cookies and maybe sugar-free candy. You can also bring fresh fruit or sandwiches in for a healthier choice.



#6. If you are asked by the principal or vice-principal to talk to another teacher about a student transfer out of your class (maybe a parent wants it) do NOT let yourself be talked into not doing it by the other teacher, no matter how sure they seem of their position. When they say to you, "Just see what happens; this will work itself out," insist on the switch instead. Don't trust the other teacher to always know what is best for you. Not doing a switch will make the parent quite upset. The other teacher may just want to prevent a troublemaker from going to his or her classroom.

#7. Never, never discard your official seating chart, or allow your students to sit where they want to. I learned about seating charts in teacher training. I was told to stick to them religiously, making only very small changes when needed.

Then I let my supervising teacher talk me into discarding my seating chart, and allowing my students to sit where they wanted. This was such bad advice. I should have known better. It made taking attendance VERY difficult, and of course this showed on my official observation grades. It is okay to trust your mentor at the school, but he or she CAN make mistakes. Be on your guard.

#8. Be an easy grader. This is advice from another, very experienced teacher that I received after leaving the school system. At least while you are learning, make it easy for students to get a good grade in your class. This does not mean that students who don't turn in ANY work, or do not understand what you are saying, etc. should just get an automatic passing grade.

But you might want to consider how to make it happen for your problem students too. It sounds kind of wrong, but could make sense if you want to keep your job or get a recommendation. No good recommendation = no career, remember. And we are talking real life, not how you would like things to be.



And.... Before you accept the job...

In your interview, if you are asked what your special interests are in teaching, do NOT say you would like to teach gifted students. This is like saying, "I only want the cream of the crop." You might even be misunderstood as not wanting to teach all the students in your class. You may get a very bad response when you say it, too, like, "What about the REST of the students??" If you are asked a question like that, have an answer ready. Don't do like me and not know what to say.

I am sure you want to care about every student in your class, so just don't say you want to teach gifted students someday, even if you do. You might plan to write a book on Gifted Students Around the World your second year, footnotes and all. But your interviewer does not need to know that. So... when you are asked what kinds of students you would like to teach someday, just say "all of them," or something like that.

Besides, only the most senior teachers get to teach those coveted gifted student classes anyhow. Just so you know. So wait on that dream, it is not necessary to share it during our interview. Just saying.

To help with other interview questions, there are some more sample interview questions you can check out in the links below this book.

In Conclusion

So... if you play your cards right, you might land into a great school that includes wonderful, super-duper teachers that give you a real helping hand. You may even have a class that includes students who want to be there. If you do, or I have helped you in any way, let me know. Thanks!

Well, that is about it. I would appreciate your hints and ideas for my next edition of this book, as I know this is just the beginning of help for teachers. Just use the contact information at the end of this book to send your ideas or comments. I look forward to hearing from you.

I hope this book will really help you. Do read it BEFORE going to that important interview, won't you?

Also, don't be afraid to ask the school some of the important questions I have mentioned, and write down the answers.



Above all, do not make a decision to sign on the proverbial dotted line too quickly, no matter how you like the school on your interview. Think about it first, for at least a couple of days, and re-read this book, to make sure you have covered all of the important questions and bases.

All of the time you spend checking the school out will help you so much.

You can then decide early on if you really want to start teaching at a school that is terrific in nearly every way, or bypass a school that is non-supportive.

Both kinds of schools DO exist. It is up to you to make the correct choice. Remember, being careful could very well save your teaching career!



(con't.)



Here are some more websites that I think will also help you in your school choices.

How school administration officials can help teachers

<http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=8458>

How to Retain New Teachers

By Harry and Rosemary Wong

<http://teachers.net/gazette/FEB03/wong.html>

50 Questions for Teacher Interviews

(for you to check out and be ready for...)

http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin396.shtml

And here are some good book ideas for new teachers:

The First Days of School – How to be an Effective Teacher

By Harry and Rosemary Wong

http://www.amazon.com/First-Days-School-Effective-Teacher/dp/0976423316/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1283141121&sr=1-1

More book suggestions from the NEA discussion boards

<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/153305>

Book suggestions from Education World

http://www.educationworld.com/a_bestbooks/archives/teachers.shtml

I will be adding more here with my readers' help. That means you! What has worked for you? Let me know by contacting me at lizann447 at yahoo dot com.

(con't.)

This book edition is by Elizabeth Sheppard.
I live at The Garden Spot in Kentucky.

My writing website is <http://www.betsyanne.com>

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And on Twitter as <http://www.twitter.com/betsyanne>.

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http://www.betsyanne.com/for_teachers_b.html

Are you a nontraditional student? Find help at the Nontrad page <http://www.nontradstudents.com> and blog, <http://non-traditional-students.blogspot.com/>.

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