

Top Ten Tips for TAs

(aka Things I Wish I'd Known When I'd First Started!)

Hi, I'm Catherine, a 35-year-old mum of two and a qualified teacher. I worked for nine years as a teacher, mainly in KS1, and then in 2016 took a career break (working with my husband in our photography business). After a few years the classroom itch was back, so when I saw a TA job at the local infants school I jumped at the chance – and I absolutely loved it. With that in mind, I decided to write down the things that helped me the most – to try and help other TAs just starting out, or returning, or moving to a new school.

I hope you like my top ten tips for TAs. I wonder if you agree with them, or whether you have your own tips that you think should make the list....?!

5

Find out the drinks preferences of your team – no, I know it's not your job to provide hot cups of tea/coffee for the teacher you're working with all the time, but providing one after a cold break duty will help with team bonding for sure! (And while you're at it, find out the mug etiquette of your school – some staff are very protective of their mugs, others are happy sharers, and some schools insist on a flask-only policy!)

6

And while I mention break duty – invest in a warm pair of boots, thick waterproof coat and an umbrella. There really is nothing more miserable than getting wet during morning break and having to be damp for the rest of the day!

1

Label everything! Anything you buy and take into school, label it! It will be borrowed, it will be forgotten to be returned, there will be a member of staff who 'forgot' that it belonged to you!

2

When doing displays, put everything up with sticky tack first – you will **ALWAYS** need to change things before stapling them down (ooh, and hold the wall stapler at a slight angle when you come to use it – it will leave a slight gap between the staple and the wall, making it a lot easier when you come to take the display down!)

3

Find out whether the school laminator needs a carrier card or not: you do not want to be the one who breaks the laminator. (And if your laminator does take carriers, you can laminate up to three sheets in the same carrier without them sticking together – saves a lot of time, particularly at the beginning of the year when you're sorting classroom displays!)

4

Make friends with the office staff and caretaker – they know everything and everyone around school and are a vital source of information (and they quite often have the power of distributing new resources when they run out, and they will know how to fix the photocopier/laminator when you inevitably break it...!)

7

STICKERS! Buy lots of cheap stickers – stickers are like currency, particularly in EYFS and KS1, but even in KS2 a lot of children will behave and try harder for a sticker. (If you want to be the children's favourite TA then buy some smelly stickers... but you have to save them for extra special occasions, don't be handing them out for anything or they'll lose their impact!)

8

If possible, ask for weekly plans for English and Maths ahead of time. (As a qualified teacher, I stress the if possible part of the sentence – sometimes planning is very last minute!) Ideally, it's great to be able to look through the plans ahead of the week to give you a heads-up about topics – it's worth highlighting which groups you have been asked to work with and check you understand the tasks ahead of time, and also think about what subject knowledge you're going to need to support those children. I always find it useful to make a list of resources the children are going to need as well, so there's no time wasted searching out the number lines or phoneme frames during the lesson.

9

Identify where around the school you can work with groups of children – it's amazing what little pockets of space you can find for a quick five-minute intervention with a small group if you go looking!

10

Last, and by no means least, find out whether your school has a Twinkl account. If it does, get the access codes; if not, consider signing up for one yourself. There are SO many useful resources on the website that will save you a bunch of time and provide you with so many ideas! And while you're at it, follow **@TwinklTA** on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#), for even more ideas and tons of support from colleagues!



So those are my top ten tips that I wish I had known when I started – I wonder what yours would be!

Seven Super Tips for New SEND Teaching Assistants

Teaching
Assistants

Celebrate

Take the time to celebrate all successes, no matter how big or small they might be. Communicating these successes with parents or carers is a great way to reinforce praise and build self-esteem. You can find a whole selection of certificates and positive praise postcards [here](#).



Sensory Breaks

Some children cope best when their learning is broken down into manageable chunks. Sensory breaks are a great way to provide children with physical and mental breaks to help keep their minds focused throughout the day. Discover our selection of sensory break resources and activities [here](#).



Now and Next Boards

These can be used alongside visual timetables to break down tasks. They can be as simple as having a 'wash hands' symbol now, and a 'reading book' symbol next. Or they can be broken down further depending on the needs of the child - for example, now we're going to use an adjective, next we're going to use a noun. Our range of now and next/first and then boards have themes to suit every interest, making them easy to personalise to the child. Take a look by clicking [here](#).



Join our amazing
SEND TA group
on Facebook!

Patience

Often learners with SEND need to have extra processing time to make decisions or reach an answer. Make sure you facilitate this by allowing them as much time as they need. It helps build their independence and is great for their self-esteem, too!



"One day something
will work. The next day
it won't. Don't worry,
just try again."
Jenny P

Be Prepared

At Twinkl, we want to prepare you for anything. We know that teaching assistants need to be as flexible as possible, especially when working with learners with SEND, as plans can change quickly. Our wide range of planning and organisation aids [here](#) can help you stay as prepared as possible. They're a great way to map out your week, keep track of interventions and make notes from any meetings you have, too!



Visual Timetables

Using a Velcro board with visual timetable symbols helps prepare children for the day ahead. It is an easy and clear way to communicate any changes to the day whilst keeping your pupils as settled as possible. Find our huge range of visual timetable boards and symbols [here](#).



Collaborate

Some of the best CPD comes from collaborating with colleagues. Everyone has their own skills and experience, so never be afraid to ask for advice or support - there's no such thing as a silly question!



"Fight for them
and be their voice
because the SEND fight
never stops, and they
deserve to be
stood up for".
Nicola C

"Sharing ideas and knowledge
with others can be so good
at helping us all become
better practitioners and in turn
help our students become
socially, emotionally
and academically able as
possible." Keri G

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