

My final draft (have students compare it to [my rough draft](#)):

Sometimes I wonder why I became a teacher because every once in a while, you just have one of those really bad days. Let me share with you what happened on the worst first day of school I ever had.

It all started when my alarm clock didn't wake me. I accidentally had programmed it for 5:30 p.m. instead of 5:30 a.m. I jolted awake to see my clock read 6:47 a.m. I only had forty-three minutes to make it to school on time. I surprised myself by dressing and combing my hair fast enough to be on the road by 7:02 a.m., but of course traffic stunk. I'm talking total, nightmarish, bumper-to-bumper gridlock. I inched along the six miles towards my school, and I pulled into the parking lot one minute after the tardy bell rang. The principal was glaring at me from his office window with his beady eyes, and I asked myself, "Why on earth did I become a teacher?"

I dashed down the hallway towards my classroom. My new batch of students crowded around my locked classroom door. They looked so irritated, like a bunch of mosquito bite victims without Calamine lotion, and I didn't blame them. I boil over when they show up late, so I would understand them being mad at me when I am late, especially if it's the first day of school. I reached into my pocket and—oh no!—I didn't have my school keys. Over the summer, they sit in the top drawer of my bureau at home because I don't need them over the summer, and they were still sitting in that drawer this morning. In my rush after waking up late, I had forgotten them. Ten minutes later, I had found the custodian who unlocked the door for me. The look on his face and on my students' faces showed both disgust and disappointment. I asked myself, "Why on earth did I ever become a teacher?"

The students all plopped into seats, and I started distributing the handout that explained my class rules, which I had made copies of the Friday before school began. As I began passing the papers out, I noticed terribly embarrassing spelling errors and punctuation errors all over the document! I couldn't send these home, asking parents to sign them in this condition. Shocked at my own mistake, I dropped the entire pile of handouts. The students tittered at this. Their laughter turned to howls when I bent down to pick them up, and my pants ripped up the seam like a split banana peel. I often gain 5-10 pounds over the summer, but never had I gained enough to make my pants rip on the first day. I pretended like

it didn't bother me that much, but it infuriated me. I mumbled, "Why on earth did I ever want to become a teacher?"

I had to take control. I attempted to begin teaching the first day's lesson to my students when the principal stuck his head in the door. He must have wanted a little retribution for my being late the very first day of school. Every time I'd open my mouth to say something educational to my students, he would ask a weird question, stopping me from doing any teaching. "How was your summer? You look fatter--did you eat a lot of barbeque? How is your dog?" When you're late to school on the first day, you don't want to be rude to your principal, even if he is preventing you from teaching a lesson. I just had to endure it, and I watched my students' faces while it happened. It was clear their respect was vanishing, and I thought, "Why on earth and in the name of Heaven did I ever set out to become a teacher?"

The damage had been done. I had been late, I was keyless, I had a handout that made me look clueless, and a principal who was callously asking me silly questions from the doorway. You have to start your school year strong, and you have to show your students you are in control of your own classroom. Otherwise, they choose not to learn from you. As I struggled—looking like an injured bird in a crowded sidewalk—to survive my first lesson, I realized they were all talking to each other about their summers instead of listening to a single thing I had been saying. I didn't know any of their names yet, so all I could say was, "Hey you, I need you to listen to me," but they just droned on. I had lost them on the very first day. I fell to my knees, my pants split more, and I cried out, "Why on earth and in the name of Heaven did I ever set out to become a teacher when my students won't even listen to me?"

Here's the deal. I really dislike stories that end with "And then I woke up and it was all a dream," so I won't do that here even though that's kind of how this story will end. What I've just described to you, you see, is the nightmare that usually plagues me every year during the week before school starts. I became a teacher because I'm quite skilled at helping my students pay attention in class and make sense of important things they really should know. My nightmares about school attempt to convince me I've lost my ability to do that. I'm stronger than my nightmares, though, and I'm glad this new year has started out with me being on time, prepared, and in charge of my classroom.