

Paper Plane

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Report-writing time is not when you want printers to break down, photocopiers to jam or students to breathe too loudly in class. Writing reports puts teachers on edge and makes their tolerance for everyday annoyances extremely low.

In fact, even the tiniest problem can reduce a report-writing teacher to a ranting mess, incapable of seeing reason. One of my colleagues once burst into tears at the supermarket during report-writing time when her favourite flavour of Shapes had sold out. Writing reports does bad things to good people.

There are essentially two extreme types of teachers when it comes to this ghastly experience: the ridiculously well-organised and the ludicrous procrastinators. The well-organised crew like to let you know a few weeks before the reporting deadline that they have finished writing their comments and entering their data. This disclosure is accompanied by a smug smile as they return to the serious business of dominating the library laminator.



While we think we are not impacted by these types of statements, they can induce a momentary panic that can only be put to rest by carefully examining the reporting deadline, discussing it at great length with three colleagues, and then counting the days left until reports are due — out loud — on the classroom calendar to reassure yourself that time is still on your side.

There is no need to be so organised and machine-like. You'll get there, like you do every semester. There is heaps of time to get everything done. Heaps.

However, the problem is that those weeks fly by and suddenly you are sitting a few days out from the deadline surrounded by piles of unmarked assessment pieces, copious cups of coffee and a fuse that resembles a ticking time bomb. And you still have to teach.

I pity classes of children who are exposed to the emotional rollercoaster of report-writing season when their teacher is not from the well-organised camp. There is a certain panicked pitch to their lesson delivery that alerts kids that all is not well. Or perhaps it is the rapid speech, dark circles under the eyes and the cup of coffee clasped in a white-knuckled hold.

Even though we know we shouldn't do it, there are times when teachers seize the opportunity to frantically mark work or type report comments while their class is occupied with their own tasks. This tactic is frowned upon but nobody can deny the stone-cold panic that floods the room when a teacher announces they are "writing your reports right now". This phrase can produce some of the most incredible student behaviour ever witnessed.

I find it strange that I forget the horror of report writing as soon as it finishes, only to be shocked the next time it rolls around. Personally, I think schools need to close for a week so teachers can get their reports done in peace — or at least make sure the local supermarket is stocked with the full range of Shapes.

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