<mark>NOTE: Please do not request access to this document. Go to File > Make a Copy. You will then have your own copy, which you can edit.</mark>

Practical ideas and guidelines

For the school districts that aren't reopening buildings this spring, many teachers are being given just 2-4 hours to go back to their rooms one final time. Some teachers have a bit longer, but the main goal is the same: prepare students' materials to be returned to them, and prepare the room for summer cleaning.

Obviously there isn't a proven system for shutting down a classroom like this, because it's never been done before! But I can share some tips that should help, based on things you've already learned in the club.

The awesome thing about getting organized, prioritizing, managing your time, etc. is that these are skills that can be applied to lots of different scenarios. As a 40 Hour member, you're better prepared than you may realize to tackle this task efficiently. Here's how to prepare.

Expect cleaning out your room to be an emotional experience.

There's always a bittersweet quality to the end of the year, and not being able to experience it face-to-face with your students and say goodbye to them is likely to magnify the sadness. Even if you've enjoyed being at home or were having such a rough year that not being at school felt like a relief, this is still not how you pictured things ending. This isn't the closure any of us wanted.

It's very likely that you WILL feel sadness or grief or have a strong emotional reaction of some sort when you re-enter your room for the first time since the pandemic. Mentally prepare for it, and allow yourself some time after you leave the building to process those feelings. Don't allow this to catch you off guard so you spend the whole time in your classroom pushing back unexpected tears. Go in there knowing it's a difficult task and mentally preparing to push through it anyway.

Get a game plan together BEFORE you go in with a list of tasks to be checked off.

When you have a checklist of things to do, you're less likely to get caught up in just feeling sad, or waste time staring at the room deciding what to do. The list will make the task feel less overwhelming.

So, spend 15 minutes now making a list of what you need and want to get done, and then when you get in your room, all you have to do is execute the plan. You can use the editable checklist provided to help

you think through the tasks that need to be done — delete the stuff that doesn't apply, and add your own tasks as needed.

Know exactly what your administrators expect you to get done — make no assumptions.

If you're only being given a few hours, it's likely that you're not expected to shutdown the room as thoroughly as normal. Don't do anything additional because you assume someone wants it done. If you're not told you need to take down all your bulletin boards, for example, either ask for clarification or just don't do it.

As you make your checklist, put a little mark by the things you're unsure about. Then check in with your team leader or administrator before finalizing your list, and ask for specific instructions. *Does __ have to be packed away, or could it be on a countertop? Do bulletin boards need to be taken down, or could they be covered, or have the borders/background paper remain?*

Find out what is truly necessary and required so you can do those things first, and use any leftover time to tackle additional things that would be helpful for you.

Focus on what needs to be done NOW, rather than preparing for fall.

During a normal school year, I'd always advise you to plan ahead so you're set up for success next school year. But you only have a few hours, and that's barely enough to wrap up the current school year.

Also, you probably don't know what you're preparing for yet. You don't know how you'll be teaching or when your building will be reopened.

Trying to work ahead when there are so many undecided variables will end up creating double work: preparing now, and then preparing again when you have the necessary information.

So, just focus on the most important, urgent things for now — which is closing out the current school year. There will be time to prepare for the coming school year later.

Have a clear, efficient plan for preparing students' belongings for removal.

This is an area where you need to insist on clear instructions from your team leader or administrator, and plan to do exactly what's asked, nothing more.

If you are told to pack students' items, bring a plastic or paper grocery bag (or other accessible item) for each student. You could label them with students' names at home, or you might find it easier to label them with permanent markers as you're filling them.

Put student belongings into the bags as quickly as possible. Don't sort anything, or throw away the things you think are trash. Sorting will cause this task to take at least twice as long, and could result in you getting rid of something that looks like trash to you but meant something to the student for whatever reason. Shove everything in the bag, tie it up, and call it done.

Batch your tasks, and stick to your list.

It's easy to get distracted when there are so many things you need to do (or could do), and the panicky feeling that comes from knowing this is the last chance to be in your room for the foreseeable future can exacerbate that.

Don't allow yourself to do whatever catches your eye, or stop mid-task to do something else that you suddenly remember. Use your checklist. It's grouped by types of tasks so you can batch your work and do similar things together, and therefore complete them more quickly..

When you think of something else you need to do, add it to the list in the appropriate category, rather than stopping immediately to do it and then forgetting what you were doing before you interrupted yourself. Write it down — then you won't forget, and you also won't get thrown off in your current task.

Have a realistic plan if you're asked to pack everything and/or aren't returning to your room in the fall.

Ask your admin for additional time to complete this task — tell them you can get the bare minimum done in a few hours, but will need at least one full day (perhaps in the summer) to pack up and move everything. While your principal may not be able to guarantee or arrange that right now, it's not humanly possible to completely vacate a classroom in a couple of hours, and you'll have to be given another opportunity later on.

Don't stress about this for now. Instead, focus on making a plan to get the most important things done in the time you do have for sure right now.

The best course of action is probably to toss everything in boxes as quickly as you can and label them. This will create a bigger organizational challenge and more work for you later, of course — but this is a crisis. It's an emergency situation so the usual approach does not apply. You can always organize at home, or as you unpack in the fall. Let tomorrow's problems take care of themselves in due time.

If you have space, try to bring your materials and personal belongings home in their usual containers.

A box full of loose scissors, markers, books, papers, etc. is going to be hard to keep neat at home and will take forever to reassemble in the fall.

Assuming your personal belongings are mostly in containers of some sort (plastic drawers, portable file cabinets, pen and utensil holders, etc.), try to take the whole container. If it's little, put the container in a box. If it's big, just carry the container out.

The idea here is not to destroy all the organizational systems you've established for yourself, if at all possible. When you want to work on school stuff over the summer or when you're back in your classroom again, you want to be able to pull stuff out of its usual container, however bulky it may be, and have it already organized the way you like it.

If you don't have a garage, basement, or other place to store your stuff, really think carefully about what you need vs what you want. I'd rather have fewer things with me at home (but have them be the most essential items that are still neatly organized) than to have a gigantic pile of random stuff.

Take a deep breath — you WILL get through this!

Remember that if you're being allowed in the building now for a few hours, you will probably be allowed back in again before next school year begins. You might have optional access over the summer, your regular pre-planning week before students start back, or just a few hours again if lessons will continue remotely … but, it's highly unlikely that you will be starting the first day or school without having a chance to access your room and grab the materials you need.

So, you don't have to think that far ahead right now. Stay focused on maximizing the time you have in your classroom now, beginning with an organized checklist.

Editable Checklist

Once you have clarification about what's required by your administrators, add or delete from this checklist as needed. That way, you're working from one single list instead of trying to use this one and whatever your school gave you.

Use this list to help you plan in advance what you will get done and the order of your tasks when you go into your classroom. Feel free to re-order the steps if something else makes more sense to you. Be as specific as possible when making your list so you can work quickly once you're in your classroom.

Items to bring to school
- ❏ plastic or paper bags for students' personal belongings
- ❏ boxes for bringing personal materials home

Step 1. Prepare students' belongings to be returned to them
- ❏ Gather random materials that might be spread around the room, so each students' belongings are in one place. For example, if each student has a desk, but also keeps a notebook in your classroom library, a science journal on a back shelf, etc., move all of those additional items to the students' desks so everything that's theirs is together. [List out items here]
- ❏ Put students' belongings in individual bags and label them with their name
- ❏ Put all student bags in one place (a single box, countertop, etc.) according to admin instructions so they're ready to be collected

Step 2. Clear your desk/personal items
- ❏ Pack up everything you'd be devastated to have lost or misplaced — anything of financial or sentimental value. [List them out specifically here so you don't forget anything]
- ❏ Remove everything from the top of your desk or other work surfaces — putting it in a single, labeled box is the fastest solution)
- ❏ Gather materials you want to keep at home to work on over the summer and prepare for fall. [List these out here so you can grab them quickly and put them in a box when you're in your room: this could include teachers' manuals, devices you're allowed to take home, unit plans/materials for the first month of school, etc.]

Step 3. Prepare the room for summer cleaning
- ❏ Toss out/recycle any ungraded papers or stacks of student work you come across
- ❏ Protect your remaining personal belongings and teaching materials that may be damaged during summer room cleaning (i.e. anything that's sitting loose on a countertop should go in a box, container, cabinet, closet, etc.)
- ❏ Stack student chairs
- ❏ Make sure there is nothing on the floor that would be damaged if it got wet
- ❏ Safeguard technology according to admin specifications (return laptop cart, store tablets appropriately, unplug computers, etc.)
- ❏ Ensure items are labeled with your name and room number so they don't disappear over the summer

Step 4. Finish all general classroom close out tasks
- ❏ Put all books that need to be returned to the school library in one place
- ❏ Put all textbooks that need to go to the book room in one place
- ❏ Put all teaching materials that must be returned (lab equipment, etc.) in one place [list them here]
- ❏ Put all technology that needs to be returned (document cameras, projects, etc.) in one place [list them here]
- ❏ Inventory any materials you're required to [list them here]

Step 5. Remove necessary items from the classroom
- ❏ Make your trips around the school to return items where they belong (you've already gathered the materials together in step 4, so they're organized in separate piles by now and ready to be carried out)
- ❏ Take items that need to be trashed or recycled to the appropriate place in your building
- ❏ Load up your vehicle with items you are bringing home. [List these out here in advance so you don't forget to take anything]
- ❏ Take final items to the front office. [List these out here now so you can make sure you have everything, i.e. bags of student belongings, closeout forms, devices, keys to your classroom, etc.)

Misc. tasks to do ONLY if there's time
Add items here that you'd like to do if possible. Make sure you have completed the entire list above (including taking things out to your car) before beginning any of these additional tasks so you don't run out of time. The idea is that if you finish early, you'll have a list of things to choose from.
- ❏