

## Introduction



Everyone agrees that the role of the teaching assistant is growing in importance. It was this exciting development which prompted us to publish our best-selling *How to be a Successful Teaching Assistant* in 2002. At that time, there was nothing to help teaching assistants to understand their role. I hope that this new, updated paperback edition will play a role in supporting teaching assistants over the coming months.

Today everything is changing. With the historic signing of an agreement on *Remodelling the School Workforce* in January 2003, all schools will be looking with fresh eyes at the ways in which they use support staff. Remodelling has the potential to enhance the status and work/life balance of all who work in the education sector and significantly improve pupils' learning opportunities and standards of achievement. It provides an opportunity to reassess the necessary roles and to focus on the work of those involved in the education of pupils. This, in its turn, will provide every pupil with a chance to achieve greater success and higher standards.

From September 2003:

1. No teacher will routinely be expected to undertake clerical and administrative tasks [see page 112 of this book for a list of these]
2. Schools will be expected to make better provision for the work/life balance of their staff, and
3. All teachers with management responsibilities will expect to receive non-contact time.

In short, remodelling involves a change of mindset. Tasks which have, in the past, been undertaken by teachers will, in the future, be the job of other support staff. We have already seen how learning mentors can help pupils by providing one to one advice and guidance, and over the next few years various higher level teaching assistant roles will develop. The Government has pledged money to ensure that there will be 10,000 more teaching assistants in schools over the lifetime of this Parliament, and it is estimated that schools themselves are likely to appoint some 50,000 more staff.

In 2001/2, Ofsted reviewed the role of teaching assistants and found that, in primary schools, the quality of teaching was better when there was a teaching assistant in the classroom. At Select Education we have seen some of these improvements at first hand. We intend to continue to explore ways in which we can help support staff to improve the quality of pupils' learning.

## INTRODUCTION

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There is now a range of qualifications available for teaching assistants and this guide covers the requirements for NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Whether you are just starting out as a teaching assistant or are already more experienced, we hope that you will find *How to be a Successful Teaching Assistant* to be an invaluable introduction to the role.

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2003

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## How to use this resource

This resource has been written to be of use to those who are beginning in their careers as teaching assistants as well as those who have considerable experience. The first four sections deal with the fundamental information that you need to know to work in a modern school, focusing primarily, though not exclusively on the primary sector. They describe the teaching assistant's job, what it involves and what sort of people become teaching assistants, as well as the core values that underlie the modern educational system like equal opportunities and anti-discrimination.

They explain how schools work and the different individuals and organisations you are likely to encounter working in a school. Finally they describe the kind of learning that goes on in schools today, dealing with the National Curriculum, the Literacy and Numeracy Hours and the arrangement of the school day.

Sections five, six and seven are for all those teaching assistants, whether working in primary, middle or secondary schools, who wish to take a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). They explain what this involves and list the requirements for achieving an NVQ at levels 2 and 3. Anyone familiar with the structure of the NVQ for teaching assistants will know that this takes the form of a number of units of competence which candidates must prove they can meet. This resource provides a summary of what is involved for each one of those units.

Section eight of the book, the case study, contains an interview with a teaching assistant working in an inner-city area of London. Other teaching assistants will find a great deal that is both helpful and inspiring in this. Section nine, the jargon-buster, is a list of terms you are likely to meet while working in schools, with simple and accurate explanations. Section ten contains the full list of units of competence for NVQ levels 2 and 3.

The guide is intended to be used as an aid to professional development. Throughout the text it contains suggestions for activities which will help users take on board the information contained within the resource. In addition there are a number of photocopiable pages which can be used as training materials either by groups or by individuals.

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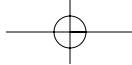
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## WHAT IS A TEACHING ASSISTANT?

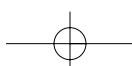
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# 1

# What is a teaching assistant?

This section covers

- What the job involves
- What sort of people become teaching assistants?
- The skills you will need
- How schools have changed
- Caring for children



## 1.1

## What the job involves

Teaching assistants (also known as classroom assistants or learning assistants) play an increasingly important part in education today. Their job involves helping teachers to teach and pupils to learn, and they are an essential part of the drive to raise and maintain standards in our schools. They work in the classroom alongside the teacher, supporting pupils with their learning, keeping them on task and providing another adult presence to whom pupils can turn for help.

The job of a teaching assistant has a great many attractions, including flexibility, variety, job satisfaction, the rewards of acting as part of a team and of course the challenges and pleasures of working with young people. Unlike many other jobs, there is nothing boring or predictable about it. Because you are part of a learning environment, every day can be different. You may find yourself working with individual children or with groups, in a classroom or in a hall, in a playground or on a field trip. Among other tasks, you may be asked to help set up the classroom resources, listen to pupils read, help them work on a computer, support them with their numeracy, provide comfort for a child who is upset or unwell or assist the teacher with record-keeping.

## 1.2

## What sort of people become teaching assistants?

Teaching assistants come from a wide range of backgrounds. They can be men or women, young adults, those in their middle age or older people. Some have professional qualifications but others do not. Perhaps you are one of those people who felt that the educational system failed you when you were young. Well, that doesn't mean you can't be successful as a teaching assistant. In fact an experience like that may make you better able to understand the difficulties that children face with learning. The most important factor is that you should like young people and enjoy helping them gain in knowledge and experience.

Some reasons why people become teaching assistants:

*"The hours fit in with my children's schooling."*

*"It's a creative job."*

*"I like working with children."*

*"You're working with people."*

*"Satisfaction of watching children learn."*

*"No two days are ever the same."*

## WHAT IS A TEACHING ASSISTANT?

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# 1.3

## The skills you will need

Probably the most important skills that a teaching assistant requires are common sense, a willingness to learn and a calm, patient manner. It's also important to realise that you will undoubtedly bring a whole host of skills to the job that you might not have even realised you had. For example, an important part of a teaching assistant's work involves helping pupils with their social development and this can be as simple as praising them for good behaviour.

The experiences that you have gone through, both in your own childhood and as an adult, will help you in your new role. What you discovered about yourself and others when you were building relationships, making friends, learning how to get on with people, perhaps looking after children of your own: all this is extremely relevant.

*“As a teaching assistant, you’re learning yourself. It’s important to be honest about that.”*

One thing that everyone involved in education is expected to support fully is the idea of equal opportunities. Put simply, this means that all pupils are treated equally whatever their background. So discrimination against people because of race, religion, gender or disability is not tolerated and as a teaching assistant you will be expected to behave with fairness at all times.

# 1.4

## How schools have changed

A lot has changed in schools in the last few years and some of the things that you come across in the modern classroom may be unfamiliar to you. The way that children are taught nowadays is likely to be quite different from the way in which you were taught. This is particularly true since the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Hours. But there's nothing to be afraid of. After all, if children can manage it, then so can you. Nobody starts the job knowing everything there is to know about it. Part of being a successful teaching assistant involves learning yourself and it's important to be honest about this and upfront about any worries you may have.

One of the things that surprises some people is that classrooms nowadays can sometimes be quite noisy places. Once upon a time teachers didn't allow their pupils to talk at all

but it's now widely recognised that discussion can contribute to learning and pupils may be encouraged to work together in groups to solve a particular problem. Not all teaching is like this, however, and at other times pupils will be expected to listen in silence to what the teacher is saying. It's also important to realise that teachers distinguish between busy noise and idle chatter. In fact if there's one thing that characterises the modern classroom it's the variety of methods that teachers adopt. They will use a whole range of strategies in order to help children learn and this may take a little while to come to terms with.

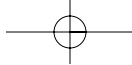
When you start a job as a teaching assistant you may feel concerned that you won't know what to do, but it's important to remember that you will be acting as part of a team, and at all times you will be working under the direction of a qualified teacher and within the framework of the school's policies and procedures for dealing with issues like anti-social behaviour. Colleagues will be in place to advise you, should you need their help and a good school will provide support and training where it is necessary. Of course learning who is who can take a little time and the way that a school works can seem quite baffling to a newcomer. But once you are on the inside you will soon discover that modern schools are friendly places where the emphasis is on encouragement.

## 1.5

### **Caring for children**

Schools take the well-being of children very seriously and certain teachers in every school will have specific responsibility for this. It is known as the pastoral care of children. The word "pastoral" comes from pastor, which means shepherd, because of the old idea of a shepherd looking after his flock.

It's important to realise that when you work as a teaching assistant you are in loco parentis. This is a legal phrase which means in the place of a parent. In other words, it's up to you to do your best for the children in your care. They are your responsibility and you should have their best interests at heart at all times and it is important to remember that you will be held accountable in law for their welfare. This doesn't mean you have to behave like superman or superwoman. But it does mean that you have to act like a sensible, helpful, trustworthy adult and a friend to the children in your care.



## WHAT IS A TEACHING ASSISTANT?

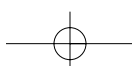
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### *Activity*

What have you done so far in your life that has prepared you for being a teaching assistant? Make a chart to show how you think it may have helped.

**Experience:**

**Skills you have learned:**



*Check out your skills*

# 1.6

## Photocopiable page

Assignment: Assessing your own experience

How has your life so far prepared you for the job of teaching assistant? Look at this list of tasks that a teaching assistant might be asked to do. How confident would you feel about tackling each of them? Put a tick in the box next to a task you would feel reasonably confident about and a cross next to any you think you might have trouble with.

	✓	✗
Hand out books, pencils, rulers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen to pupils read	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help with computers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage and praise children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Take part in lesson planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help children make decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tell the teacher about a child who was behaving disruptively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help the teacher keep records	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feedback to the teacher on how an activity is going	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summon help in an emergency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help a shy child feel more confident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help with counting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfort a child who is upset	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photocopy worksheets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Help pupils follow instructions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deal with emotional outbursts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Look after children at playtime	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Encourage pupils to co-operate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognise when a child is unwell	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Listen to pupils' ideas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adjust the heating or lighting in a classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### What does your result tell you about how you would cope?

The chances are you got half or more, and if so then you're already halfway there. If you didn't, maybe you should go back and look at the list again. Some of the tasks are easier than they sound at first.