
Introduction to Teacher Aide

TEACHER AIDES—WHAT THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ARE NOT

Teacher aides come in all sizes, shapes, and ages. Some are junior high students who tutor elementary school students. Other aides are high school and college students who help out in athletic programs or after-school programs. Some teacher aides are parents who want to work at the same school their children attend. Some teacher aides are professionals who spend time in schools serving as role models and helping students with career decisions. Still, other teacher aides are retired persons who just want to help others.

You probably have several reasons for pursuing a career as a teacher aide, or at least for signing up for this program. Perhaps you enjoy being with children. Perhaps you had a lot of experience baby-sitting and caring for younger brothers and sisters. Maybe you were a tutor of younger children when you were in school and enjoyed the experience. Maybe someone tutored you and now you want to give something back in return. Perhaps your reasons are more practical. Perhaps your own children are now in school, and you would like a job with the same hours.

Whatever your reasons for becoming a teacher aide, you'll find the information you need in your study units. The first order of business, then, is to have an accurate idea of exactly what a teacher aide is and what a teacher aide isn't (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1—Whatever your reasons for becoming a teacher aide, you must enjoy working with children. (Photo by Guy Cali/Setting courtesy of Scranton Preparatory School)

Let's begin by looking at some basic definitions. A *teacher aide* is someone who assists or gives aid to a teacher. Sometimes we call a teacher aide a *teacher assistant*. It's important not to mix up this term with an assistant or student teacher. An *assistant* or *student teacher* is a person who has taken a certain number of college credits toward becoming a licensed teacher. A teacher assistant, on the other hand, may have taken college classes and may or may not intend on becoming a teacher.

It's important to realize that teacher aides are paid paraprofessionals, not volunteers. A *paraprofessional* is a person who has usually received training in how to assist a professional. Just as a paralegal assists a lawyer, so, too, a teacher aide assists a

teacher. As paraprofessionals, school districts hire and fire teacher aides. The districts also assign certain hours and duties for the teacher aide. Some teacher aides work full time in a school; others work part time. Still others work half time in one school and half time in another.

Some school districts distinguish between an *instructional teacher aide* and a *noninstructional teacher aide*, so it will be important for you to know what these definitions are, too. The main function of an instructional aide is instruction-related. His or her job directly supports the curriculum *in the classroom*. Although an instructional aide does perform clerical functions, most of his or her duties are instruction-related. On the other hand, the main duties of noninstructional aides involve activities that are *outside the classroom*, such as supervising students during recess. Another name that's sometimes used for a noninstructional aide is *supervisor*. Your program will prepare you to work either as an instructional or noninstructional teacher aide.

Now that you have an idea of what a teacher aide is and is not, let's look closer at the duties of both instructional aides and noninstructional aides.

Typical Duties of the Instructional Teacher Aide

As you just learned, an instructional aide directly supports instruction in the classroom. The four main ways that an instructional aide provides support are

- Monitoring
- Teaching (under supervision)
- Tutoring
- Clerical work

As a prospective teacher aide, you should know what each duty entails and why each duty is important.

Monitoring

The most common task you may have as a teacher aide is to monitor the seat work of a small group of students. This means circulating among the group while the students are working, and making sure that they understand the directions. Your purpose is to clarify and encourage, so that the students can complete the work successfully and with confidence (Figure 2).

Teaching (Under Supervision)

Some teacher aides have skills and creative abilities, such as playing a musical instrument, calligraphy, embroidery, or woodworking. A teacher who doesn't have such skills may call upon the teacher aide to instruct the students in the skill or ability. Perhaps the teacher aide will teach the students a song. Or perhaps the aide will teach the students how to make a certain Mother's Day gift. Such added extras are important in providing the students with different enriching and educational experiences (Figure 3).



FIGURE 2—A teacher aide monitors the work of a small group. (Photo by Guy Cali/Setting courtesy of Scranton Preparatory School)

FIGURE 3—A teacher aide may guide students with painting.



Tutoring

As a teacher aide, the teacher may direct you to tutor students in a one-on-one situation or in small groups. Tutoring will require a certain knowledge of reading, writing, and figuring mathematical calculations, depending on the subject matter. It will also require good communication and listening skills. Tutoring is important in giving students the attention they need to understand a subject and to improve their grades (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4—A teacher aide tutors a student in a one-on-one situation. (Photo by Guy Cali/Setting courtesy of Scranton Preparatory School)

Clerical Work

Many teachers like their aides to do some of the clerical work that otherwise would take time away from their teaching. Going to the teachers' workroom and making copies of work sheets for use in class is an example. Another example is grading homework and other papers, using the teacher's grading key, and then recording the grades in the teacher's grade book. Some states allow only the teacher to enter grades in the grade book, however, so you should check with the school before expecting this responsibility.

Many states don't allow anyone but the teacher to take attendance. In other states, however, this is one of the tasks delegated to the teacher aide. The aide takes attendance and then carries the names of the absentees to the office or hands the absentee list to the student assigned the task by the office staff. Another clerical duty may entail filling out audiovisual requests for the teacher. Some teacher aides prepare materials for students to use, such as covering tables with newspaper before an art lesson and assisting students in the cleanup when the lesson is over.

Other clerical tasks include collecting lunch and milk money and taking them to the office. Teachers may ask their aides to phone parents to ask them if they would be willing to chaperon an upcoming field trip. Some teacher aides may even make the arrangements for the field trip.

Some teacher aides assist with classroom management, especially with a difficult class or in some special education settings. Other aides work (and sometimes manage) the school library. Likewise, teacher aides with computer experience may monitor the use of the school's computer room, and so on (Figure 5).

While such clerical duties may not seem related to the primary purpose of the instructional aide, they're very important in aiding instruction. If a teacher can delegate clerical duties to a teacher aide, he or she has more time to spend actually teaching.



FIGURE 5—Teacher aides may take down materials from the bulletin boards and post something new.

Typical Duties of the Noninstructional Teacher Aide

In contrast to instruction-related duties, the noninstructional teacher aide has responsibilities not directly related to the instructional process. Mostly, these duties take place outside the classroom. One example of a noninstructional teacher aide is the lunchroom supervisor who monitors the students while they're eating lunch.

Likewise, the yard supervisor, after-school supervisor, bus supervisor, and hall supervisor are all noninstructional aides. Other examples of typical noninstructional tasks include accompanying children to and from the lavatories, as well as folding and addressing school newsletters for mailing to parents.

Sometimes, a noninstructional aide assists the school nurse in checking children's heights and weights for their school records. When a school has to layoff its nurse for financial reasons, the teacher aide may have sole responsibility for doing the height and weight charts. Noninstructional aides may also help a district nurse in screening the health of the children. Should you have the proper training, you could even be asked to provide emergency first aid.

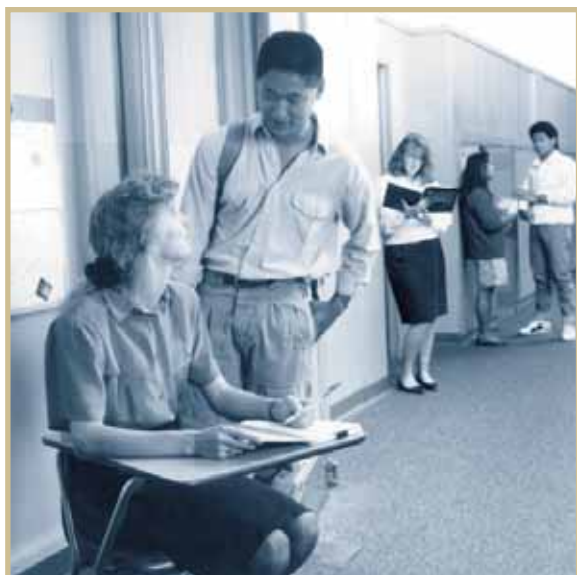


FIGURE 6—A teacher aide supervises the hallway between classes. (Photo by Guy Cali/Setting courtesy of Scranton Preparatory School)

While the duties of noninstructional aides are very different from those of instructional aides, they do serve a needed function in the school. Schools need both types of aides to provide a safe and stimulating environment where students can learn (Figure 6).

Before proceeding further with the material in this study unit, stop to consider what you've learned so far. Every so often throughout your program, you'll complete a self-check so you can test your knowledge. Completing these quizzes will reinforce the ideas you've already learned. Be sure to review the material for any questions you miss.



Self-Check 1

At the end of each section of *Introduction to Teacher Aide*, you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

- _____ 1. A teacher aide is the same as a student teacher.
- _____ 2. Teacher aides are paid paraprofessionals, not volunteers in the school.
- _____ 3. Instructional teacher aides can only expect to do clerical work.
- _____ 4. Teacher aides may either be instructional aides or noninstructional aides.
- _____ 5. An instructional aide has duties in the classroom that assist, in some way, the instructional process.
- _____ 6. An instructional aide in a preschool may supervise a small group of students who are finger painting.
- _____ 7. A teacher aide may assist the school nurse by recording the height and weight of students.
- _____ 8. Instructional aides are never asked to share their talents or skills with the students.

Check your answers with those on page 47.
