

Teacher Guide for Volunteers in the Classroom

Developed by



Teacher Guide for Volunteers in the Classroom

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

William Arthur Ward

Introduction

Thank you for welcoming OSU students as volunteers in your classroom. Volunteer opportunities in P-12 schools benefit university students as well as students in Pre-K through 12th grades. You will find this guide useful for having more effective and productive experiences working with the volunteers in your classroom on a daily basis and for improving the OSU volunteers' transition to your classroom.

The module content is primarily drawn from teachers' experiences in working with the volunteers and is based on the information provided to us by the University District teachers. It is our intention that the module will help teachers across grade levels and different subject areas learn how to host, manage, supervise and coach volunteers in the classroom. Please feel free to make copies of this resource for your teachers.

The online version of the module is posted on the Community Connection website. To access the teacher module and other available resources, please visit Community Connection website at.

<http://communityconnection.osu.edu/training.html>.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following teachers and university district neighborhood schools for their contributions in the content of this learning module:

Teachers: Lovie Debnam, Pam Condo, Carol Lynch, June Charles, William Shrum, Christine Sapp-Capatosto, Ingrid Harris-Luft, Bonny L. Shplet, Ann Bousedra, Angela R. Jackson, Carol Morgan, Krista Jacob, Geri Granger and Uyen Zimmerman.

Schools: Second Avenue Elementary School, Crestview Middle School, Centennial High School, Medary Elementary School and Arts Impact Middle School.

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Unit 1. Benefits of Hosting Volunteers

Having a volunteer in your classroom can support instruction and improve students' learning through a variety of ways. Volunteers can work with small groups of students or one-on-one; can tutor in math, reading and computer courses; can proctor make-up tests or prepare snacks for children; can lead games and assist teachers during field trips, class projects and lab activities. Through these activities, volunteers bring a different perspective to the classroom, students spend more one-on-one time with volunteers and teachers have more opportunities to break the classroom into small groups.

➤ **A different perspective**

Due to their diverse backgrounds, volunteers can offer a different perspective on guiding the students in your classroom. Additionally, the students can have access to another adult in the classroom who might have worked in many different fields. The volunteers can tutor, co-teach, or instruct as a guest lecturer and bring their unique perspectives to the classroom. A volunteer may explain something in a manner which clicks with that student.

"Don't ever question the value of volunteers. Noah's Ark was built by volunteers; the Titanic was built by professionals." Dave Gynn

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➤ **More individual attention**

Students like one-on-one attention particularly someone closer in age to their own. Having someone answer their questions and concerns quickly help them focus on learning tasks. Volunteers can tutor or read with students who are struggling or need additional support. Flexible helpers can be excellent problem solvers when a student is having a bad day.

➤ **More opportunity for small groups**

Previous studies have shown that students learn better in small groups. Volunteers allow the teacher to break the classroom in small groups in a large classroom. They can help the teacher with daily routines, individual project logistics, and take care of minor tasks so the teacher can concentrate more on instruction.

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Unit 2. Preparing Your Classroom

Teachers need to specifically think about how the presence of a volunteer supports instruction and enhances learning for the students in their classroom. Volunteers want to have contact with students in a safe environment and want to make a difference in a young person's life. Consider volunteers' motivation, examine your lesson plan, and prepare your classroom and lessons accordingly.

➤ Re-examine your instructional objectives

Examine your style and consider adapting your schedule and plan so that on the days you have volunteers, your lesson plan can accommodate them. It is important that you remember the volunteer in your daily lesson planning. Make sure that there is something the volunteer can help with and review your expectations with them regularly to help them learn and feel comfortable.

Plan to give them opportunities to work with students. Build in time for chit-chat during tasks so that volunteers establish a relationship with the children. If a task will take a volunteer 30 minutes to complete, give the volunteer 40 minutes and mention the extra time. You may also prepare a worksheet or a folder of specific tasks for volunteers to complete with children in designated areas.

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➤ **Arrange your classroom**

Although every classroom has certain flow of daily learning activities and routines, your classroom may need slight adjustments to support the students' work with volunteers. Ask yourself if your classroom structure is conducive to someone just walking in and getting to work. Volunteers should be provided with a space to work with students individually or in groups; they should be provided with materials, tools, and supplies to work with, and a place to put their personal belongings.

➤ **Inform your students**

Although many students are used to the presence of volunteers in the classrooms, it is recommended that you inform students, parents and any other cooperating teacher about the arrival of the volunteers, the purpose for their visit, and their role in the classroom. You may need to tell your principal as well or the front office staff so that check-in is smooth for the volunteer.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."
Margaret Mead*

Unit 3. Orienting Volunteers

Before volunteers start working in the classroom, teachers need to think about what volunteers might need to know about the school and the classroom.

Although they may learn the routines over time, it is always helpful to provide them a brief overview of the school and the classroom they will work in.

➤ Introduce your school

This may include the location of the school, the nearest bus stop if available, the school calendar, school hours, check-in and check-out procedures, parking, and building entrance. In addition to logistical information about the school, you should also talk about the school goals and policies regarding dress code and code of conduct.

➤ Introduce your classroom

While today's classrooms are diverse in many respects, volunteers' experiences and expectations may be otherwise. Describe the socio-economic, ethnic and cultural background of your students, the age group and any special needs addressed such as students who speak English as a second language and any mental or physical disabilities your students have. Volunteers can learn the classroom rules over time by observation. However, briefly discussing the norms and routines of your classroom in regards to your discipline policy and volunteer's role in discipline will expedite a volunteer's comfort in your classroom. Discuss your policies on such things as pencil sharpening, bathroom procedures, appropriate noise level, start-end times, and lunch times.

➤ **Prepare a volunteer information kit**

You may not be able to provide every detail in the beginning due to your time constraints, therefore preparing an information kit in advance for volunteers can be very helpful for future reference. The kit may contain materials such as the school handbook of policies and goals, a school or classroom newsletter, a building map and a list of relevant websites where the volunteers can access more information about your school and specific curriculum standards pursued. The volunteer information kit could be placed in your classroom library where volunteers and other visitors could check it out or make a copy when they first arrive your classroom.

*"If you approach each new person you meet
in a spirit of adventure, you will find
yourself endlessly fascinated by the new
channels of thought and experience and
personality that you encounter."*

Eleanor Roosevelt

Unit 4. Classroom Practices

Volunteers are constantly visiting classrooms in many schools with the hope of making a difference in students' lives. Their experience can be a fulfilling experience for both the teachers and the volunteers if teachers put enough thought in the process and offer necessary guidance to the volunteers. It is strongly recommended that teachers plan systematically to get the most benefit out of volunteers' support in the classrooms.

➤ Make them feel welcome

It is important to acknowledge that your classroom is a new environment for a volunteer and they might not feel comfortable jumping in right away on their first day. Before the volunteer actually starts to volunteer in your classroom, provide opportunities for your students and volunteer to get acquainted with each other.

Model a positive relationship and communication skills for your students and expect them to treat the volunteer with respect. First introduce your volunteer to the students and allow them to speak to the class if they feel comfortable or let the volunteer interact as they see fit. This will help the volunteer feel welcome and begin building relationships with your students.

➤ **Discuss your teaching style**

Discuss your instructional style and the needs of your students with the volunteer. Spend some time with the volunteer to acquaint them with your classroom procedures, teaching methods, the abilities and learning styles of your students, the personality of the class, curriculum standards, proficiency test information and any special needs addressed in your classroom. For example, if you have a specific way to ask questions or encourage critical thinking, help your volunteer with these methods to provide consistency for your students.

➤ **Assign specific tasks**

Volunteers usually come to the classroom with only a vague idea of what they will be doing to support you. They may know your expectations in general but they will still expect the teacher to assign them a task during their presence in the classroom. Therefore, you should have something meaningful and specific planned for them to do. State clearly what you would like the volunteers to do each time you see them. Keep a folder of work for students to do with volunteers and be sure to inform volunteers of any schedule changes (e.g. field trips, assemblies, school holidays etc).

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➤ **Assign reasonable tasks**

Volunteers are most successful when they take on responsibilities gradually. When assigning tasks and responsibilities for the volunteer, make sure that they are reasonable and doable for the volunteer. Initially, assign small tasks to begin and work up to more involvement. For example, they can start tutoring different students one-on-one, then move to small groups, and eventually help the whole class once they feel comfortable. Give interesting and fun activities for the volunteer to do so that the students will enjoy their time with the volunteer.

" If you have come to help me, you can go home again. If you have come to see my struggle as part of your own for survival, then perhaps we can work together."

Australian Aborigine woman

Unit 5. Supervising Volunteers

Supervision is a critical part of working with volunteers whether you have one regular volunteer or a flux of different volunteers in the classroom. Teachers must be supervisors and mentors for volunteers to support them in the course of their volunteer experience. Through effective supervision you can make sure that you and your students are benefiting from the extra support and volunteers are comfortable in their role and learning from their experience in your classroom. Once you assign a task for the volunteers, it will take some time for them to feel that they are actually accomplishing what is expected of them. Work with them until you sense that they are comfortable. Your encouragement might help a volunteer to become a teacher!

"Volunteers are the only human beings on the face of the earth who reflect this nation's compassion, unselfish caring, patience, and just plain love for one another."

Erma Bombeck

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➤ **Observe the volunteers**

Observation is a good way to identify the challenges that a volunteer or your students might encounter while working together. Observe them in various instances to support learning on both sides. Observation can be done ‘secretly’ while you are moving around the room or working with other students. For example, how does the volunteer interact with your students? Are your students cooperating with the volunteer? Does anything need to be changed? What’s going well? You can also ask your students individually how the volunteer is doing and if they feel comfortable.

Encourage your volunteer to keep brief notes on what they accomplished at each session and ask if the volunteer has any questions. If you need to criticize a volunteer do so in private, just as you would with your students. If you have the opportunity to compliment, feel free to interrupt. In cases where volunteer's late arrival is interrupting your classroom routine or inappropriate behavior or dress is an issue, first talk to the volunteer to remind him/her of your expectations of conduct in the classroom. If the behavior persists, follow your school's policies to deal with it.

*“The only people, with whom
you should try to get even, are
those who have helped you.”*

May Maloo

➤ **Offer constructive feedback**

Feedback and constructive criticism for the work of the volunteers is the most important aspect of supervising volunteers in the classroom. Your feedback helps the volunteers learn more about how to work with your students and how to meet your expectations from them. The feedback should not always magnify what needs to be done right but also what successful things they have done with the students. Your positive approach can make the volunteers understand that they make a difference and their input is valuable in your classroom.

➤ **Offer meaningful feedback**

While feedback could be in any form such as verbal, written or through electronic means such as email, talking to the volunteers is the best way to share your opinions of their work. One-on-one interaction with the volunteer will compel them to continue to work with you. You can spend a conference session or your lunch time talking to them about how things are going and give necessary advice for any questions they might have. Ask if they feel useful and what you could do to make their visit more successful. In addition to your personal feedback, share your students' comments about the tasks or activities with the volunteer. You may also ask the volunteers to keep a journal about their experience and provide them written comments. This is especially useful when working with service learning students who are in your classroom to fulfill the community service requirement for a class. The community Connection website has a journaling feature to assist with this.

Unit 6. Completing the Commitment

When it comes time to say goodbye to a volunteer, try to acknowledge the volunteer's contribution in some meaningful way. Volunteers often feel most appreciated when they receive positive feedback from the students and the teacher that they worked with.

➤ **Praise the volunteers**

Thank you notes or cards especially from the students provide creative ways to express gratitude for the time that they spent in the classroom. Try to involve the students' feedback by surveying their thoughts and opinions. Provide an opportunity for the students and volunteers to say goodbye. It is important to establish when their last day will be so that the students are prepared.

You may want to consider giving the volunteer a small gift or having a pizza party with the students, but this is certainly not required. If you feel that the volunteer deserves further recognition, offer to do something for them, such as writing a letter of recommendation.

"It is only through the eyes of others do you see yourself. It is only through the work of your own do you find the difference in others." Foo Ji-Wei

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➤ **Offer final feedback**

Many teachers find it valuable to have a final discussion, self-reflection, and evaluation with the volunteer of the pros and cons of the experience. You might want to highlight the progress that the volunteer made, discuss any concerns that they still might have, and provide helpful suggestions. Even if your experience wasn't particularly beneficial, be constructive in your feedback. Express appreciation by pointing out any progress that students have made with the volunteer and by inviting them back to your classroom.

Do's and Don't Do's

- Don't expect the volunteer to know what you want them to do. Do tell them what your expectations are and the directions for the tasks.
- Don't give them too much to do at first. Do ask them what they are comfortable and not comfortable with.
- Don't be vague about what you want them to do. Do give them specific but reasonable tasks.
- Don't give them your most challenging student. Do give them small tasks and one-on-one tutoring at first.
- Don't make them feel "in the way". Do treat them as professionals.
- Don't give too much responsibility without supervision. Do find out where they are comfortable.
- Don't let the volunteer assume the full role of the teacher as they would have different relationships with the students. Do expect them to act appropriately around children.
- Don't be afraid to share a little of yourself with the volunteers, that will help you and the students bond. Do value their help and allow student interaction

Resources

P-12 Project Standards of Behavior for Volunteers Working in Public Schools

These standards of behavior apply to volunteers who work in public schools through The Ohio State University's Community Connection or University Neighborhood Schools project. A volunteer's involvement with public schools is a privilege and a responsibility, not a right. Volunteers may be terminated at any time at the sole discretion of the school or of the volunteer service coordinator. Volunteers will:

- Perform agreed-upon duties in a responsible and timely manner.
- Conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner and provide positive role models for students.
- Accept supervision and support from teachers, principals, other school personnel and from volunteer service coordinators
- Abide by applicable school rules, policies and guidelines, as directed by school personnel.
- Refrain at all times from physical contact with students
- Refrain at all times from physical or verbal abuse of students or personnel
- Report immediately any threats to the volunteer's emotional or physical wellbeing to school personnel.

Volunteers acknowledge that, at the discretion of the public school, The Ohio State University, or of non-profit agencies providing volunteer activities in the public schools, criminal background checks may be conducted.

P-12 Project Policy with Respect to Volunteers in Public Schools

The P-12 Project works with students, faculty, and staff of The Ohio State University to facilitate volunteer opportunities in the public schools. This policy shall govern volunteer activities in public schools that are facilitated by the P-12 Project.

- Volunteer opportunities will be made available to students, faculty, and staff affiliated with OSU.
- Volunteers in schools will be supervised by school personnel. Every effort will be made to provide such assistance to school personnel as may be requested, within the bounds of the P-12 Project mission, funding and directives.
- Volunteer coordinators will be provided with and will agree to abide by the P-12 Project Guidelines for Volunteer Program Coordinators. These guidelines are readily available on the Community Connection website.
- Volunteers will be provided with and will agree to abide by the P-12 Project Volunteer Standards of Behavior for Public Schools. These standards are readily available on the Community Connection website.
- At the discretion of appropriate school staff, the P-12 Project, or the volunteer program coordinator, a criminal record check pertaining to any record of prior child abuse, felony, domestic violence, petty theft, etc. may be conducted on any volunteer or potential volunteer.
- Volunteers may be terminated at any time, at the discretion of the school, the volunteer program coordinator, or OSU.

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Weekly assignment guide for volunteers

Weekly Assignment guide for the volunteer (Week of

Day	Assignment	Standards	Reflection-Feedback
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

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Web Resources

Community Connection

<http://communityconnection.osu.edu>

The Youth Connection: Preparing to Work with Children and Teens

<http://communityconnection.osu.edu/training/yc/>

The Diversity Connection: A Guide for Neighborhood-Based Service-Learning –

<http://communityconnection.osu.edu/training/diversity/>

The Service-Learning Connection: An Orientation to Service-Learning

<http://communityconnection.osu.edu/training/orientation/>

Columbus Public Schools

<http://www.columbus.k12.oh.us>

Academic Content Standards

http://www.ode.state.oh.us/academic_content_standards/