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# How to Start Off Right in Your New Job



I remember moving across the country with my dog, just two weeks before my college's orientation for new hires. I had no idea what to expect in my first job at a small, teaching-focused institution, but I wasn't nervous — just anxious to get started. Little did I know just how frantic I would feel once the academic year began.

Today I am a newly tenured professor who is about to chair my department. I thought back to my former self when I reached out this summer to help our newest hire prepare to start work in the department. Instead of just winging it as I once did, I advise newcomers to be much more intentional about transitioning into a new job, be it your first or your fifth. Here are a few things

I wish I'd spent the summer doing that might have helped me feel less behind before my job even started.

Get comfortable. If your new position involves relocating to a new town, try to arrive at least three weeks before the start of the academic year. Give yourself time to get settled into your home and acquainted with the city.

And then turn your attention to your new campus. At minimum:

- Familiarize yourself with campus offices, especially human resources, IT/technology support, faculty development, the dean's office, and the registrar. Those are the people with whom you will undoubtedly interact in your first semester, if not your first week. It is important that you not only know where to find them on the campus, but also who is responsible for what in each office. Make an Excel spreadsheet of who's who that you can consult as needed, and add to, as you progress through your first year.
- Spend some time on the department's website, reviewing its course schedule, curriculum, and staffing. Refresh your memory on your colleagues' research agendas, graduate advisees, and sabbatical schedules. You need to understand the basics of the department before things get chaotic and people don't have time to explain the logic behind course sequencing or how TAs are assigned. Grasping how the department functions will help you know where you fit in the flow of things and will flatten your learning curve.
- Set up your office. Do what you can to make it a comfortable space that is conducive to meeting with students, but that also honors your workflow. I learned that sitting behind my desk as I met with students created a power differential with which I was comfortable. So I created a meeting area complete with rug, coffee table, lamp, and two chairs on the opposite side of the office from my desk. When I realized that I like to work on multiple projects at once, I ordered a U-shaped desk that allows me to organize papers and books into themed stacks on different parts of my desk. The desk also allows me to turn my back on the door if I need fewer distractions in light of the department's open-door policy. Finally, because I spend so much time in my office, I wanted to make it more "homey," so I had it painted a bright color, added candles to the coffee table, hung artwork, and eventually added an elliptical for the days when I wasn't able to exercise before work. While you may not have this level of freedom or space, the point is to design your office to maximize productivity and comfort. Don't forget to create a list of office supplies you need and request them at the start of the year before the budget is depleted.

Begin networking. Send an update to your department about your recent (or impending) arrival in the area. That's not only respectful and friendly, it's also practical. Some departments plan retreats just before the start of the new year, but if your colleagues don't know you are around,

Here's how to get started creating your local network:

- Speak to people as you go about your business in your first weeks on the campus. Especially for tenure-track, visiting, and adjunct faculty members, it is important that people know you. That doesn't mean you have to be friends with all of your new colleagues; it means you should open the door to professional relationships that may come in handy later.
- Look up community organizations and local businesses that may be related to your new position. You might find opportunities to enhance your research or teaching via those groups. Or they might just be a place to do professional service work (e.g., serving on a local board). It always looks good when you can bring a new partnership to your department and/or institution.
- Use your social-media accounts for professional purposes. Join local and national professional groups, and let them know about your new job. This is a good way to meet other people who may be starting at your institution or who work in the area. Even if they don't turn out to be a professional resource, you may make some new friends. Having someone to eat lunch with on "the first day of school" can alleviate the social anxiety that comes with being the new kid.

Get a head start. Some department chairs avoid email like the plague over the summer. Still, it is a good idea to check in with your department head now to ask if there is anything special you should be doing to prepare. If the chair doesn't respond, consider my advice here to be similar to what your chair might have said.

- Do a self-assessment. What professional needs must be met in order for you to be successful? If this isn't your first faculty job, why did you leave your previous one? What do you want to do differently in this job? Make a plan to ensure you start this position the way you intend to proceed.
- Check with human resources about onboarding and orientation. You may need to submit specific documents or complete online programs to process your hire. You don't want to find out two days before your start date — or worse, after you haven't been paid — that there were a bunch of things you were supposed to have done.
- Visit the IT experts on campus. It's summer, and they are much less frantic than usual. Get your ID and your computer set up and/or ordered. You will get on their good side if you do this early because it means that now they have one less person to deal with at the start of the academic year.
- Confirm your fall teaching schedule. Use these summer weeks to [draft your syllabus](#). If you will be teaching a course that's been offered before, try to locate previous syllabi that you can use as a guide in creating your own version. This will also give you time to source

- Contact your department's administrative assistant (if that person works in the summer) and inquire about purchasing anything you may have negotiated in your contract. Often, department staff members have no idea what you worked out with the dean or provost, but they are responsible for making it happen. They're not going to do it all for you, though. So send a nice email to inform the staff members of these terms and inquire about any steps *you* need to take to order furniture or get reimbursed for moving expenses.
- Transition your research projects if you haven't already. Look at [IRB requirements](#), lab space, library resources, etc. Begin to envision yourself as a scholar in this place. How does a change of location change your research agenda? You should also look at grants and fellowships offered by your new employer that might support your work or at least your conference travel. The first round of applications are often due in October, so it is best to know ahead of time if you plan to apply.

The only other advice I can offer to ease your transition into a new job is to maintain professional ties with your prior colleagues (assuming those relationships are emotionally healthy). It is not uncommon in academe to return to previous institutions in a new role, so you don't want to burn bridges.

Plus, the academic world is small. You never know who will edit a journal you submit articles to, chair an organization you are involved with, or serve as an outside reviewer during your promotion process. So even though you're now in a new professional location, don't forget the places you've been along the way.

Good luck.



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