CIRCLE 1 LIVING
Where worth lives.



Stop Grading Your Sundays

Come home after the bell

Seven reasons the work comes home

Seven field notes from the faculty lot. Each one names an alarm, and one move that fits after the bell.

Brandon and Lorraine Cover

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Teacher Sunday scaries

Teacher Sunday scaries turn a free day into Monday with the halls still empty. Saturday can still be a day. Sunday night, the tote is already packed.

Tonight, when the dread lands, catch it first: there it is, the alarm. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight. Then empty the tote onto the table and make two piles: required, with a real due date, and the rest, which goes back to school.

Already drowning, with grades due Monday? Then the required pile comes home and the rest still does not. Two piles works best on the worst week.

Saturday morning you are a person. You make something that is not a handout. You laugh at a thing that is not a student's joke you are grading for effort. The building is a building you do not work in, for a few hours.

Saturday evening the first leak starts. You remember a parent, or a stack, or a Monday that went badly the last time Monday happened. You tell yourself you will not work. You move the tote closer to the door so Future You is not rushed. Future You has heard this before.

Sunday afternoon you open "a few." The few have a way of being the ones that need a comment, and the comment needs a lesson, and the lesson needs an example. The day tips. You are not resting while thinking about school. You are at school, in your kitchen, in socks.

Sunday night the body arrives before the thought. Chest, stomach, the particular tired that is not sleepiness. You are already in first period. The lesson you have not finished becomes evidence that you are behind, and behind becomes the kind of person you are.

You are short with the people you live with, over a dish or a question, and the apology you can offer is thin because part of you is already gone. They are having Sunday. You are having Monday.

You pack the bag with more than Monday needs, because extra feels like safety. The tote rides buckled beside you, the way Shannon buckles hers, because once a stack slid off at a stop sign and a whole class ended up under the brake pedal. A belt on a bag of essays is funny until it is the truest thing in the car.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

If you have spent the back half of a free day preparing for a day that was going to come whether you prepared or not, and called the preparing love of the work, you are in the right place. Some of it was love. Some of it was the alarm, hiring Sunday so Monday could not surprise it.

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What is riding in the tote?

Shannon teaches high school English. She is 44. Her tell is the glasses, up into her hair when she is thinking, down when she is sentencing a sentence. On a Tuesday she sits in the faculty lot with 88 essays belted in beside her. 14 are done. At her usual rate, the other 74 want 37 more hours. She does the arithmetic in her head, though she is the English teacher.

The reason her pen runs long has its own page, Why grading takes so long. This page is about the Sunday it eats.

The dread on Sunday night is a surge. The body is in Monday. The tool for a surge is not a new planner. It is the short catch. There it is. The alarm. Then one breath: in for four, hold for seven, out for eight. Once. If it is still loud, twice more, and then you stop. About a minute, not a new evening practice that becomes another thing to dread. A teacher's ten seconds are already in the week: the walk to the kettle, the zip on the tote, the minute the copier warms up on Monday. Not a new ritual you will skip at 9:40 on Sunday.

Why don't Sunday tips work?

The usual advice says protect your weekend, and then lists hobbies. The hobbies are fine. They lose to the alarm for a specific reason. The alarm has a piece of evidence. The stack is real. The parent email is real. The sentence on the old form is real, even if it is old. "Don't work on Sunday" asks you to ignore a real pile, so you feel dishonest the whole time you are ignoring it, and dishonesty is exhausting, and you open the pile to make the feeling stop. The feeling stops for 20 minutes and then the pile is larger, because you are now in it.

The missing move is a sort, not a ban. Some of what is in the tote is required. It has a due date that is not your anxiety. Some of it is the pen answering a sentence from years ago, one essay at a time, at 30 comments each. Those are not the same objects. A ban cannot tell them apart. You can.

In the chapter called The Tote Bag, the rule on the board is *You go home.* The corner you drop is high effort, low impact, where a Sunday goes to hide and calls itself rigor. Mandated work never goes in that corner. Shannon empties the tote on the table and sorts it. That is the practice. Not a personality transplant. A bag, turned out, with the required work put back in and the performance put back on the desk where it can wait for contract time.

Where do the three circles sit on a Sunday night?

Circle 3 is the building. Class size. The schedule. What a student does with a comment. What an administrator wrote once, near the bottom of an observation, and never revisited. Whether Monday is hard. You can sort a tote perfectly and Monday can still be hard. That is not a failed Sunday. That is a school.

Circle 2 is the colleague who will hear "I am not taking this pile home," the department that can share a comment bank, the family who can be told that Sunday after 8:00 is not grading time. Influence. They may not clap. Penny, in the same book, learns that a no to the extra is not a no to the people. The

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people in your house are not the building. Tell them which hours are off, and then keep the hours, or the sentence was a wish.

Circle 1 is the sort, the breath when the surge hits at 9:00, and the decision to leave the performance pile on the desk. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. Not in a Sunday that looks like a magazine, and not in a Sunday that looks like a second job you hired yourself for.

Why will a new planner not hold Monday?

When Sunday tips, the alarm often offers a productive way of coping. A new planner. A color code. A Sunday routine with a name. The routine feels like the opposite of dread, which is why it is so easy to buy. Look at what it does. It spends the free hours organizing the unfree ones. The stack is not smaller. The stack has a legend. Shannon's comments have a history like that: one sentence near the bottom of an observation, and then years of a pen that will not risk *adequate* again. A prettier system on top of that pen is still the pen.

The book does not hand her a planner. It hands her a sort, and eventually one weekend where the bag stays in the building. Sunday night is where you practice the catch before Monday needs it.

There is a second way of coping, and it is the grading itself, which deserves its own page because it feels like craft. 30 comments, a lesson in the margin, a comma splice taught in full to a student whose phone could define it. That pattern eats Sundays and calls itself standards. If that is the leak, go to Why grading takes so long after you have sorted the bag once. Do not try to reform the pen and the weekend in the same hour. The alarm loves a double project. A double project is how 8:00 becomes midnight with both jobs unfinished and the moral score at zero.

If Sunday night is not a pile at all, if it is only the body in Monday with no stack in sight, you still use the catch and the breath, and you do not invent a pile so the feeling has an object. A dread without a tote is still dread. Give it the minute. Do not give it a new unit plan at 9:30 to justify the adrenaline. The unit plan is Circle 1 only when you are the one choosing it in daylight. At 9:30 it is often Circle 3, the week, wearing your handwriting.

What do you do with the next Sunday?

Name the hour it tips. Not "weekends." The hour. For a lot of teachers it is late Sunday, after the light goes. For some it is Sunday morning, which means Saturday was the only day. Write the hour down. When it arrives, the first move is the catch, not the tote. There it is. One breath. Then you are allowed to look at the bag. If you look at the bag first, the alarm will have already decided the evening.

Empty the tote once, on a table, and sort two piles only. Required, with a real due date that is not your fear. And the rest. The rest goes back to school, on the desk, for contract time. Required can come home if it cannot be done in the building, and it comes home with a finish line: a time you

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stop, even if the pile is not adorable. Shannon's 37 hours are what happens when a finish line is missing. One Sunday of two piles will not fix the pen. It will show you how much of the bag was the pen, answering an old form.

One weekend, the bag stays at school. Not forever. One. If the thought of it makes you angry, the anger is information about how long the alarm has been the one packing. Tell the people you live with what you are trying, so they are not surprised by a person who does not know what to do with her hands. The hands will want a pen. Give them a dish, a walk, a foolish show. Do not give them a "few" essays. The few are the way back in.

If the dread is not Sunday but the email that ruins a weeknight, that page is The angry parent email. If the hours are the whole problem and not only the weekend, start with How to stop taking work home.

The opening is on the teachers page.

The book is sixteen Wednesdays, and the one weekend Shannon's tote stays on her desk.

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What to do

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How to stop taking work home

How to stop taking work home as a teacher is a sort, not a mood. The tote rides home buckled in, because the day did not feel finished. Ten minutes before you sign in and a comment bank written once can start to bring the hours back.

Tomorrow, before you sign in, take ten minutes in the car: water, food, a bathroom, your voice.

No ten minutes because you are on morning duty? Do water and voice on the walk from the lot. Pick one thing that stays at school this week anyway.

The contract day has an end. You have seen the number. You have not seen your classroom from the outside at that minute. There is always one more thing that would make tomorrow less sharp, and tomorrow is a kind of person you are trying not to fail.

The tote is buckled in. You check it at red lights the way other drivers check a child. You are not embarrassed by the belt. You are a little embarrassed that the bag sits up straighter than some of your students.

At home the stack goes on the table before your coat is off. You say you will do a few after dinner. Dinner happens beside the stack. The stack wins, because paper does not chew.

You do work you were not asked to do, because the asked work is dull and the extra work looks like care. A new anchor chart. A comment longer than the paragraph it answers. A lesson rebuilt at 10:00 because the one you had would have been fine, and fine has started to feel like the word on a form.

You have probably brought the work to the table and called it a season, and the season did not end when the unit did. The hours came home one decision at a time. They go back the same way. Not in a manifesto. In a car, before you sign in, and in one pile that stays at school.

How many hours after the bell are the job?

Stop Grading Your Sundays is built on a contrast the faculty lot already knows. The hours after the bell, set next to the hours a contract names. Shannon, with 88 essays, 14 done, and 74 to go, can see 37 more hours in the arithmetic. The book does not pretend those hours are imaginary, and it does not pretend they are all required. The sort is the point. Some of the hours are the job. Some of the hours are the alarm, a way of coping that looks like care.

People call the sort teacher work life balance. The version that holds is smaller than the phrase: ten minutes before you sign in, and one pile that stays at school.

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There is a second pile that looks like yours and is the building's. Raquel teaches special education. She is 26, second year, and her tell is the sleeves, hands gone inside them when the room gets sharp. Her principal pulled her to cover a fourth-grade class, twice, when the sub did not come. A boy owed 120 minutes a week with her got 70. She said so at the table and had not put it in writing, because the sentence in her mouth started with not wanting to be a bother. The book shows her saying the true thing in writing, once. How that writing goes is your building's process, not this page's.

What are the ten minutes before you sign in?

The daily practice in the chapter called Three Comments is not a night routine. Night routines lose. The practice is ten minutes in the car before you sign in. Water, food, a bathroom, your voice. Engine off, phone face down, before the lot turns into the building.

Your voice is the tool you will spend all day. Notice it before the hallway spends it. The ten minutes are not vocal exercises from a poster. You eat. You drink the water you will not get again until lunch, if lunch happens. You use the bathroom before a room full of people makes that a negotiation. You do not spend the ten minutes answering email in the lot. The lot email is how the day starts already behind, with someone else's urgency in your mouth.

Then one question. Is this mine, and who is it for? Ask whether this hour serves the students in front of you, or the fear of being *adequate*.

About a minute for the question. About 15 minutes when you look back at the week and ask what was only busy. The surge, Sunday night in the body, lives on the Sunday scaries page. Do not run a weekly review in the parking lot while your heart is already in first period. You will call the review a failure. It was the wrong weather.

What do you write once?

Shannon's hours multiply because the carefulness is redone on every paper. In the step-back at quarter grades, she writes her comment bank once. What she would say about a comma splice, about a buried idea, about a quotation the length of a grocery receipt. Once. Then the paper gets a pointer, not a seminar.

That is the mechanical heart of not taking it home. Work that can be written once and reused is being rewritten every night because the alarm does not trust a shortcut. A bank feels like cheating the first week. It is not cheating. It is a refusal to teach the same mini-lesson 30 times in the margins, at your kitchen table, to students who will read the grade and make a paper airplane. The page on why the pen takes so long is here: Why grading takes so long. Use it if the bank is the part that sticks.

The step-back asks three things. What is working. What is only busy. What to write down once. Mandated work is never the corner you drop. The anchor chart nobody required, rebuilt at 10:00, is allowed to be only busy. The grades that are due are not. The sort fails if you put the required work in the let-it-go pile and call it boundaries. That is the overcorrection. The floor stays. Everything above the floor is yours to set down.

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What comes home, and what stays at school?

Circle 3 is class size, the schedule, a student's choice, a family's night, the minutes a building promised and did not deliver. You can carry those home forever and they will not move. Name them so they stop disguising themselves as your undone virtue.

Circle 2 is the colleague who will build the comment bank with you, the department that can agree what a floor comment is, and the people at home who can read the stop time on the bag. Influence. A no from a colleague is not a command to take the whole pile.

Circle 1 is the ten minutes, the bank written once, and the pile that stays in the building. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. Not in being the teacher whose car is a second classroom.

Why is a stop time not a mood?

"Until it is done" is how 37 hours hide inside a sentence that sounds responsible. Done, for the alarm, means safe from *adequate*. Safe from *adequate* is not a time. It is a feeling, and the feeling recedes as you approach it, which is why the stack can be worked every night and still look the same size. Shannon's department chair, on the way out, says "Go home, Shannon," and does not apologize for the sentence. The sentence is not cruel. It is a clock. The apology would have turned the clock back into a negotiation.

Give the pile that must come home a stop time before you open it. Not a hope. A time on the clock that is not a dare. When the time hits, the pen stops, even if the paper in your hand is mid-sentence. Mid-sentence is survivable. A stop time you break "because this one is almost done" is not a stop time. It is the old sentence, wearing a watch.

If the tote is buckled in, the work has a body in the car. Leave the thing that is not required in the room before you lock up. The required pile can ride if it has a stop time written on a scrap and stuck to the bag. The people who live with you can see the scrap. They cannot see a standard.

Shannon, later, gives a quiet student three words when he needed a real comment. The table tells her the comment that matters is the floor. The student who needs a true sentence gets a true sentence, on contract time, from the bank or from you. What goes is the seminar in the margin. Name the error. Do not rebuild the lesson under the student's paragraph.

What do you do this week?

The car, before you sign in, four things. Water, food, bathroom, voice. If the email is open, close it until the four are done. The email will still be there. Your voice might not be, if you spend those ten minutes on it.

One task, written once. Not the whole curriculum. The comment, the direction, the mini-lesson you keep retyping. Put it where you can paste it or point to it. If a paper needs more than the bank, it gets more, on contract time, not as a new religion.

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One thing that does not come home for five school days. Choose something above the floor. The extra slides. The reread of email you already answered. The comment that is a paragraph when a line would do. Leave it in the room. If the guilt is loud, the guilt is the alarm, not a deadline. The deadline pile is the one you named as required. Do that one with a stop time, and then the tote stays, or it comes home for that stop time only and then it is done even if it is not pretty.

The no that feels like failing the kids is its own way of coping, and it has its own page: Teacher guilt.

The opening is on the teachers page.

The book is the evening the chair says "Go home, Shannon," and nobody apologizes for the clock.

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Why grading takes so long

Why does grading take so long? A teacher asks it with the stack still open. The stack takes the night because each paper is being asked to prove you taught it. The student needed a note. The pen is writing a defense.

On the next paper, write one true line where you would normally write five, and stop.

Already behind by fifty papers? Do the four-word line on the ten that need it least. That buys back the hour for the ten that need a real note.

You pick up an essay that is decent. There is a real idea in the second paragraph, buried under a quotation the length of a grocery receipt. You write a kind line next to the idea. Then you teach the comma splice in the margin: the name, the definition, two ways to fix it, an example. You bracket the quotation and write four lines about how much of someone else's sentence a paper needs. The page has more of your handwriting than the student's typing. You have not finished the class set. You have finished one.

You count, because counting feels like control. Page one carried eleven comments. Your usual is about 30. You came to that number after one sentence, and the number has been loyal ever since. The student will read the grade, say the paper was fine, and miss every note except the one that confirmed what they already thought.

You tell yourself this one needs it, and the next one needs it, and the one after that is "quick." The quick one is not quick. It has a semicolon the student tried, and you want to honor the attempt, so you write a small essay about semicolons. Honoring the attempt takes 20 minutes. The attempt was one mark.

You are angry at how long it takes, and you are also proud, and the pride and the anger are the same pen. If you stopped, you would feel like the teacher the sentence described. So you do not stop. You get slower, and you call the slowness standards.

A former student writes you, years later, about a paper where you did almost nothing. You remember the paper as a failure of effort. They remember the one line.

If you have marked a page until the page was mostly yours, and called it feedback, you are in the right place. The student did not need that margin. The student needed to know someone was still in the room with the idea. The rest was the alarm, building a case that the lesson had been taught.

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What did one word on an observation do to her pen?

Shannon's number has a source: nine years ago, one sentence near the bottom of an observation called her feedback adequate. The pen has been in correspondence with that sentence for years. 88 essays belted in beside her, 14 done, 74 to go, 37 more hours at the usual rate. She is the English teacher, and she still does the arithmetic, because the arithmetic is the only thing that tells the truth about the pen.

In the first Wednesday of the book she reads her own comments aloud. Good, say more about this. Then the comma splice, with the definition, the three fixes, the example. By the eighth comment she can hear the rhythm. It is the rhythm of someone following a child around a room, picking things up.

The facilitator holds the marker and separates two things that have gotten stuck together. The comma is the student's. The comment is Shannon's to make shorter. The student's phone can define a comma splice in a few seconds. What the phone cannot do is care that the idea in the second paragraph was real. That care is the comment. The definition, the three fixes, and the example are Shannon making sure nobody can say she did not teach it.

She tries to stop. Essay 15 gets three comments. On essay 16 she writes *comma splice* and the definition comes out of the pen behind it, whole, with its example, before she can ask the question. Essay 16 gets thirty-one. Going on is easier than stopping. The pen is not confused. The pen is scared.

The card the table gives her, when it settles, is short enough to tape inside the grade book. The comma is the student's. The comment is yours. Name it. Don't fix it.

What did four words do that thirty comments did not?

The chapter called I Want to Hear More is a letter, not a system. A former student, now a public defender, writes Shannon. The only thing she had put on his paper was *I want to hear more.* Four words. They did what 30 comments never did. He is not flattering her. He is reporting a mechanism. The four words left the paper his. The 30 comments would have made the paper a conversation with her standards, which he was never going to win, so he would not have entered it.

The facilitator mirrors and does not reassure. The mechanism is rude and useful. The student who needed to know you were listening needed a short proof of listening. The seminar in the margin was for the form, and for the administrator in the back row, and for the night you could not stand to be *adequate*.

Later the table catches the overcorrection. Shannon gives a quiet student three words when he needed a real comment. The comment that matters is the floor. Name the error, or name the idea, in a sentence the student can use. Do not vanish into a code the student cannot use, and do not write the lecture. The floor is a true note. Everything above the floor is the alarm's exhibit.

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Why does speed advice miss the pen?

The internet is full of ways to grade faster. Some of them are fine as logistics. A timer. A bank. A stack in order. None of them work while the pen believes that a short comment is an accusation. You will adopt the timer and then write the definition anyway, and the timer will become another thing you failed. The problem is not minutes. The problem is who the comment is for.

A machine that writes the margin for you has the same hole. It can produce 30 comments in a breath. It cannot tell which of them is for the student and which is for your fear. If you paste them, you have hired a faster pen with the same boss. The sort is one you can run with a red pen you already own.

Lower your standards. No. The standards are not the wall. Shannon's eye is good. She can hear a buried idea. The wall is the inability to stop once the true note is on the page. The move is not carelessness. The move is a finish line on the comment, set before the pen starts. One job for this margin. Name the comma, or point at the idea, or ask the question. Not all three, and not a lesson.

Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

Who is the comment for?

Circle 3 is what the student does with the comment, what the form said years ago, what a parent will claim you did not teach. You can write a beautiful margin and still not control any of that. The old sentence is the building's fingerprint. It is not a warrant that lives in your hand forever.

Circle 2 is the department that can agree what a floor comment is, the colleague who will look at one paper with you and say "that one was enough." Influence. You cannot force a culture. You can stop being the person who models the seminar.

Circle 1 is the pen stopping. The comment bank written once, which the quarter-grades chapter gives Shannon, so the definition has a home that is not every margin. The choice to name and not fix. That is the worth. The hours come back from that choice, not from a speech about the weekend.

What does one paper look like when the pen stops?

Take the essay Shannon has in her hand in the lot. Decent. A real idea in the second paragraph. A quotation the length of a grocery receipt sitting on top of it. The old pen writes the kind line, then the splice lesson, then the bracket, then four lines on quotation, then a question about whose idea it is. By the bottom of the page the student has been followed around the room.

The floor pen does three stops and then gets out.

First stop, the idea. One line, next to it, that proves you saw it. *I want to hear more,* or a plainer cousin: *This is the paper. Start here next time.* That line is for the student. It is not for the form.

Second stop, the comma, if the comma is the one error worth naming today. Write the name. Do not write the textbook. If you can feel the definition arriving, that feeling is the old sentence, not the student. The name is the comment. The repair is his, in class, where you already taught it, or where

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you will teach it once to the room instead of 30 times in secret.

Third stop, the quotation. A bracket, and four words, not four lines. *Too long. Your idea first.* Then the pen is done with this paper.

Count the comments when you are done with ten papers, not one. If the count is still near 30, the job line at the top of the session was a wish. If a paper has one line and the student needed the floor, add the floor and stop again. The public defender's letter is not a command to be cryptic. It is evidence that a short true note can do a job a long defensive note cannot. You can test it on Tuesday without waiting for a letter.

Give the session a time. When the time hits, the uncapped pen is a choice, not a fate. Cap it. The unfinished paper will be there on contract time. *Adequate* will also be there, in your head, and you can greet it by name without inviting it to write.

What do you do with the next stack?

Before you uncap the pen, write the job of the comment. One line at the top of the session, not on the paper. "Name the error" or "point at the idea" or "one question." When the pen starts the definition, you are off the job. Stop the definition. The student who needs the rule can get it in class, once, where everyone can hear it, not 30 times in secret.

Four words, on purpose, on one paper. Not as a stunt you do forever. As a test. Choose a paper where you would normally write the seminar. Write the one true line and nothing else. *I want to hear more,* if that is the truth. Or the name of the error and no glossary. Hand it back. See what the student does. Shannon's former student became the evidence. Yours might only say "cool" and make an airplane. That result is data about the seminar, too. The airplane was already going to happen. You do not have to fund it with your Sunday.

Catch the floor when you swing too far. If you have gone so short that a student who needed a real note got a code, that was too far. Add the sentence. The comment that matters is the floor. The practice is not minimalism. It is the end of the exhibit.

The hours the bag spends in the car are on How to stop taking work home. The Sunday the stack eats on purpose is on Teacher Sunday scaries. The form, and the feeling that one word made you a bad teacher, is on I feel like a bad teacher.

The opening, with eleven comments on page one and one word, *adequate*, is on the teachers page.

The book is the letter that says *I want to hear more*, and the pen that stops after the true line.

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Teacher Sunday scaries

How to stop taking work home

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Teacher guilt

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Tonight's move

On the next paper, write one true line where you would normally write five, and stop.

What to do

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Teacher guilt

Teacher guilt can make a no feel like a moral event, because the alarm has fused you with the building. If you step back, a child goes without. That is the story. It is not always the fact.

Next time the yes starts forming, at the closet or the email or the sign-up sheet, stop for one breath before you answer.

If you already said yes, a no in writing tomorrow still counts. 'I can't after all' is a full sentence.

You wake up sick and spend the first hour writing sub plans longer than the lesson they replace. You apologize to the sub, to the team, to the students in your head. You check email from the couch to prove you are still a teacher, which means you are not, in fact, home.

You are asked to cover a class during the only minutes that were yours. You say yes before the ask has finished. Your own class will be fine, you tell yourself, which means you will make it fine later, at the table, with the tote.

A child comes in cold. Your closet already has coats you bought. You are calculating the twelfth before you have said good morning. The calculation feels like care. It is also a private budget doing a public job.

You turn down a duty and then do three smaller ones so nobody can say you are not a team player. The three smaller ones add up to the duty, plus the shame, plus the email where you explain yourself.

You say no to a colleague's ask and feel it in your shoulders for a day. They rise. They stay up. You call that posture. It is a brace.

You buy the supplies, the snacks, the pencils that walk away, and you are angry in the checkout line and generous at the classroom door, and you cannot find a way to be only one of those.

You have probably paid a bill that was not yours because the unpaid version made you feel like you were abandoning someone smaller. The feeling is old. The child is real. Those two facts do not make your wallet, or your sick day, or your evening, the right tool.

Why does the twelfth coat feel like the job?

Penny teaches second grade. She is 52. Her shoulders are the tell. They rise, and they stay up, and she calls the brace posture. When the alarm runs her, she copes the Provider way: fawn, the peace kept by spending her. On the first cold morning a boy arrives at 7:50 without a coat. Her closet holds 11 she has bought. The twelfth is already a picture in her head. She has covered a class during her own planning. She has skipped lunch. She answered a parent at 8:40 the night before. The coat is not a surprise. It is the next yes in a day made of yeses.

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She runs one breath on the reading-rug stool, in for four, hold for seven, out for eight. The surge is the urge to fix the cold with her own money before anyone else can see it. The gap does not make the boy warm by magic. It is long enough that she can do a different next thing. She gives him a coat. There are 11. He should not be cold while she sorts her philosophy. And this time, instead of buying a twelfth, she emails the social worker.

That is one teacher on one cold morning, not a rule. The twelfth coat is your money, spent to quiet the building's gap. It works once. It trains the alarm to shop. The boy needed a coat today. He also needed a building that does not depend on Penny's Saturday errand. Both can be honored without pretending they are the same action.

The email is influence, aimed at the person who can do the job again on the next cold morning.

Why does every no feel like failing the kids?

The building has a job here too. Your debit card is not the school's coat closet.

The nightmare under that way of coping is a child who needed her and met her absence. So every no pre-writes that nightmare. A sick day becomes abandonment. A declined duty becomes a moral hole. A lunch becomes selfish, which is why Penny's lunch, eaten sitting down, is a plot point and not a lifestyle tip. She has not been sitting. The body was the closet too.

The table, later, has a line for the overcorrection she falls into. She turns down a real ask from Raquel, the one ask that was a person and not an extra duty. The line is: no to the extra isn't no to the people. A boundary that cannot tell a person from a task will either say yes to everything or no to the colleague who needed you in the room. The practice is the distinction. Extra duty, extra purchase, extra hour: those can be no. The person in front of you, the one real ask, might still be yes, and the yes is chosen, not ripped out of you by guilt.

Her finish is a no in writing, with no sorry in front of it. The sorry is how the way she copes buys back the right to have said no. It keeps the relationship, and it keeps the next ask easy, which means the no was a draft. A clean no is shorter than you think you are allowed to be. It does not include your medical history, your guilt, or a promise to make up the hour you declined. You did not decline an hour you owe. You declined an extra. If you owe the hour, this page is not a trick for getting out of the job. It is a way to stop paying extra on top of the job and calling the extra your goodness.

When is the generous reading not generosity?

The kids don't have anyone else. Sometimes that is close to true for an hour. It is almost never true as a permanent structure, and the alarm prefers the permanent version because it justifies the closet. If they have no one else, that is a building failure, and an email to the person whose job it is. Your permanent private fund is not a solution. It is a secret budget the building will not see, and therefore will not fix.

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A good teacher stays late. Stay late when the work is the floor and the hour is the one you chose with your eyes open. Do not let the proverb decide. Proverbs are how guilt sounds like wisdom. The floor is the lesson you owe, the child in front of you, the note that meets the standard you can say out loud. Above the floor is the twelfth coat, the third club, the email at 8:40 that could have waited for the morning and a full night's sleep. You are allowed to be good and also done.

If I don't, it won't happen. Test it once, on something that is not safety and not the child standing in the cold this minute. Let one extra thing not happen. Watch who notices. Often the answer is nobody, which is humiliating and useful. Sometimes the answer is the person who should have been doing it, who could not start while you were already finishing it. Penny's email is that test, aimed at a real office, not at the void.

Whose job is the coat?

Circle 3 is the building's gap: the boy at 7:50 with no coat, the duty nobody else was assigned. You did not open the gap, and a Saturday errand will not close it. Circle 2 is the social worker's inbox, the office, the colleague with a real ask. Influence. Penny's email lands there. Circle 1 is the breath on the reading-rug stool, the coat from the closet that already exists, and a no in writing with no sorry in front of it. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else.

What does a sick day look like from the first minute?

The alarm does its best work before you are out of bed.

You wake up unable to teach. The alarm offers a bargain. Go in for half a day. Go in and "see." The bargain is how a sick day becomes a story you tell about your toughness, and how a room of children gets a teacher who should not be driving. The floor is the sub plans that keep the day from being chaos. Write the plans. Keep them shorter than your guilt wants. A sub can run a day from a page. Your usual three pages are the apology, formatted as instructions.

Send them. Do not add a paragraph about how sorry you are and how you know it is hard. The sub knows it is hard. The paragraph is for your standing in a courtroom that is not in session. If a child has a need the sub must know to keep everyone safe, that line goes in the plans, plain, at the top. That is the floor. The tour of apology emails to teammates is not. One message to the office, the plans, and then the phone leaves the bed.

The afternoon will try to reopen the case. You will imagine the room. You will want to check in. Checking in once, if something specific was left unfinished that only you know, is yours to choose. Checking in as a way to be present while absent is the yes, snuck back through a screen. Penny's pattern would spend the sick day helping from the couch and call it not abandoning them. It is abandoning the day off, which was the point, and it teaches the building that your sick day is a remote shift. Let the day be a day. The children are in a school, not in your absence. The school has a job. You are not the only adult it is allowed to use.

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If the guilt is about a child in the cold, come back to the morning on the rug. Coat from the closet that already exists, so he is not a lesson. Email to the person whose work continues on the next cold day, so you are not the system. No twelfth trip to the store to quiet the picture in your head. The picture is the alarm. The email is the practice. You can love the boy and still refuse to be the supply line the building does not have to acknowledge.

What do you do the next time the yes is already in your hands?

One breath before the purchase, or the reply, or the apology. At the closet, in the car, wherever the yes is forming. Then ask whose job the next action is. If it is yours, inside the day you already have, do it and be done. If it is the building's, write the one email or say the one sentence to the person who holds that job. If it is nobody's, and it is not a child's safety, you are allowed to let it be nobody's.

One no, in writing, with no sorry. A duty, a donation of hours, a request that is extra. Thank them if thanks is true. Do not pay for the no with a paragraph of self-prosecution. Penny's finish is that sentence. Yours can be one line. If you are sick, the sub plans that keep children safe are the floor. The apology tour is not. Send the plans. Leave the tour.

Notice the shoulders, or whatever your brace is. If they are up, you are already spending. Eat sitting down once this week, the way the book bothers to record it, because a skipped lunch is guilt's quietest invoice. You cannot sort a coat from a job while you are hungry and braced. The sort requires you to still be in your body.

The hours that come home in the tote are the same guilt in a different bag. That page is How to stop taking work home. The Sunday the guilt arrives early is on Teacher Sunday scaries.

The opening is on the teachers page.

The book is where Penny's no gets written down, with no sorry in front of it.

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Should I quit teaching?

Should I quit teaching mid-year? For a teacher, the letter can be true and still be early. Early means the alarm is holding the pen.

Tonight, do not open the resignation draft. Write two lines instead: why you started, and who you would want to have gotten it right for.

What your contract allows, what leaving mid-year means for a license, and when you can go are questions for your contract and the people who hold the rules. This page is the sort that comes before them.

Already drowning, with the deadline this week? Then sleep first. Tomorrow, after you have eaten, one line in each column before first period. Nothing gets signed before that.

You have a document with a name like final, and the name is a wish. You open it at night. You add a sentence. You close it. You do not send it. The not-sending is not indecision in the ordinary sense. It is two decisions stacked, and you can only feel one of them.

A student asks, lightly, whether you are leaving too. The "too" is the whole sentence. Someone already left. The student is doing a count. You answer in a voice that is supposed to be steady, and you hear the wobble, and you hate the wobble more than the question.

You look at other buildings the way a person looks at a window from inside a locked room. A new school, a new grade, a job that is not a classroom. The tab stays open. You do not click. Clicking would make the feeling into a plan, and a plan can be judged. The tab is safer. The tab is also a kind of leaving you do not have to admit at the copy machine.

You are good at the work on the days the work is possible, and you are gone on the days it is not, and you cannot tell which days are the building and which days are you. The confusion is the problem under the letter. The letter is what the confusion reaches for, because a letter feels like an action.

You draft the speech to your students. It is kind. It is also a funeral for a job you have not left, and you rehearse the funeral on a Wednesday, which makes Thursday heavier. The rehearsal spends the grief in advance and calls it planning.

Someone who loves you says you should go, or you should stay, and they say it with a clean face because they do not have your first period. Their clean face is not a reason. It is a wish on your behalf. You came here for a sort.

It usually starts as a surge treated like a decision, because the surge had a pen nearby and the pen looked like adulthood. Adulthood is the sort. The pen can wait until the sort has been done in daylight, after food, with the alarm named. The sort is two columns. The building. You. You will make them

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below, in daylight, not tonight in the draft.

What is the letter doing on the table?

Andrew teaches seventh-grade science. He is 36. Six years in one building, and then four in the six since. When the alarm runs him, he copes the Adventurer way: flight. His tell is the badge, flipped, photo, blank, photo, blank, while he talks. After the bell a student asks, "Are you leaving too?" That night, near midnight, he buys a ready-made unit rather than finish the one he has been building. The job board sits in another tab, unopened. Flight can look like preparation. A purchased unit and an unopened tab are the same flight, one of them dressed as work.

The facilitator tells her own leaving in two sentences. She taught eighth-grade English for 12 years, finished the year, and did not come back in August. She does not hand him her exit as a map. It is his story, not hers. Kim, the history teacher and the building union rep, has a line she said early and meant as a record. Some of us stay till June. When Andrew left her building in March, two and a half years back, Kim gave up her prep to sit with his sixth period, 28 sophomores, for eleven weeks. He does not know that yet. The eleven weeks are not a lesson about what he owes her. The fact sits until both of them can stand it.

On the day his principal asks, at lunch, whether he is coming back next year, Andrew puts an unsigned letter on the library table. It has a deadline on it. The book shows one teacher's letter sitting on a library table, unsigned, while a room talks. The evening's task is to see the letter without obeying it.

What he does when the deadline comes is the book's to tell, and it is his, not a moral. Another teacher in another building might sign, and the book would still want the sort first.

What are the two letters that are not the resignation?

Before the resignation draft gets another sentence, the book has a different pair of letters, written earlier, not mailed, not collected, not graded. The facilitator gives them on a quiet Wednesday.

The first is to a teacher. The one who is the reason you are one. For some people that is the teacher who saw them. For some it is the teacher who did not, the one they swore they would not become. Ten minutes. Write as a colleague, not as a student. Kim, who has filed a career's worth of precise papers, writes a memo. To, from, re. She lists what she has won. It is accurate, and it is a brief in her own defense, addressed to the woman who once told her to go find three sources that disagreed with her and then come back. The question on the board was why she is still here. The memo answered a different one.

The second letter is to one student. Not the favorite. Not the success story. The one you would most want to have gotten it right for. Maybe you did. Maybe you did not, and the car still knows the name. Tell them why you are still here. Shannon writes a name and almost nothing else. Tavon. No dear. Kim starts a heading she has used on hard letters home for years, to the parent of record, because she cannot write to the child. It makes the page official. It also keeps her worth in the record instead of in the room.

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You can write these two tonight without deciding anything about employment. They are not a resignation and they are not a pledge to stay. They are a way to hear which question your pen answers when you are scared. If the pen writes a case, you are in Kim's memo. If the pen can write a name and then stops, you are in Shannon's second sheet, and the stop is allowed. Read them to yourself. You do not have to read them to anyone. Circle one sentence that is yours, not the building's. If the sentence is "the schedule is impossible," it is true, and it goes in the building's column. Keep looking. The sentence you are looking for is the one that would still be yours in a building that ran on time.

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour. Do not sign anything that size from inside that weather.

What belongs to the building, and what is the exit?

Circle 3 is class size, the schedule, the pay scale as it is, a student's home, the fact that someone left and the students are counting. You did not cause the count. You cannot apologize your way into a different building while you are still inside this one. Name the building so it stops wearing your name.

Circle 2 is the person you can tell the truth to who is not a student. A colleague. A friend who will not turn it into a speech about their own job. The principal, if and when you choose that conversation, in the way your building's process expects. Influence. A conversation is not a signature.

Circle 1 is the unsigned page, the two letters, the unit you finish or the unit you stop pretending to rebuild as a way out. The table's line is worth keeping. Rebuilding the room can still be the exit. Flight loves a project. A project has the shape of commitment and the function of a packed box. If your "I am staying" plan is a massive rebuild that keeps you from feeling the question, look at the plan twice.

Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. Not in staying to prove you are loyal, and not in leaving to prove you are brave. Those are ways of coping. The worth is in the sentence that is yours, and in not signing anything while the alarm is the one holding the pen.

What do you do before the pen gets a name under it?

Write the two letters, not the third. The teacher who is the reason you are one. The student you would most want to have gotten it right for. Ten minutes for the first. Why you are still here, even if the answer is "I do not know" in one honest line. Do not open the resignation draft in the same sitting. The draft will eat the letters and call it clarity. Clarity that arrives in one sitting, late, is usually the surge.

Two columns, in daylight, after you have eaten. The building. You. Write one line in each column before first period. If a line could be true in any job on earth, it might be yours. If it would vanish in a building that was staffed and sane, it is the building. Make the columns. Live with them for a week before you mark stay or go. The book's letter can sit without being a failure of nerve.

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One flight you call a project. The new unit you bought instead of finishing yours. The tab you will not close and will not open. The rebuild that would take a year and would keep you from having to feel Thursday. Name it. You do not have to delete it today. Andrew's purchased unit and his unopened tab are the same move. Seeing the move is the practice. Whatever he decides, in his story the deciding comes after the seeing, not before.

The guilt that makes every no feel like failing a child, which is a different way of coping from leaving, is on Teacher guilt. The Sunday the body leaves before you do is on Teacher Sunday scaries.

The opening is on the teachers page: 88 essays, 14 done, 74 to go, 37 more hours, and one sentence near the bottom that called her feedback adequate.

The book is sixteen Wednesdays with that letter on the table, and what he can say once the alarm is not writing the sentence.

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The angry parent email

How to respond to an angry parent email as a teacher starts before the folder does. The email is short. The night is not. You are not answering a parent. You are answering a hearing you scheduled in your own kitchen.

Before you reply tonight, write one sentence that says what you heard them say, and nothing else.

If the email came at 10 p.m. and copies the principal, the reply can still wait until morning. A short 'Got this. I will reply by noon tomorrow.' buys the night.

A two-line message arrives, and your reply is five paragraphs, three attachments, and a phrase about the syllabus from the first day. You are building a record. The parent asked a question. The record is for a person who has not arrived yet, a principal, a future complaint, a version of you that refuses to be caught without paper.

You compose the reply in the shower. It opens with a phrase you would never say out loud to someone standing in your room. You delete it before you are dry. You write it again on the couch.

The subject line breeds. A follow-up on the follow-up. You can feel the thread becoming the relationship. The student is somewhere under the thread, getting smaller.

You have a file called something like final and calm. It is not calm. You knew that when you named it. The name was a spell. Spells do not hold at 10:40.

You check the mail from home, "only to see," and seeing is enough to lose the evening. The not-seeing would have been a boundary. The seeing is a choice you make with your own hand and then blame on the inbox.

You send nothing, and you also do not rest, because the unsent draft is a live wire in a folder. Kim moves hers to drafts with the attachments still on it, and makes a tally mark. One. She is not done. She has stopped performing done.

It usually starts as the long reply, written to prove you were not what the short message implied, and the proof was the problem. The parent did not need the innocence. The student needed a next step. The long reply served the first hunger and starved the second.

Why do three attachments stay unsent?

Kim is 59. High school history. Building union rep. When the alarm runs her, the way of coping she reaches for is the Knight: fight. In her hands, fight looks like a folder. She keeps the folder because a record has saved her before, and because the record has become the way she knows she is real.

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On the third Wednesday she has a parent draft with three attachments. She does not send it. The facilitator has asked for two letters that are not mail. Kim's pen, asked why she is still here, writes a memo. Asked to write to a child, she writes "To the Parent of Record," because a heading that makes the page official also makes it safe. The facilitator asks what the heading does. Kim says it protects everybody. The question that comes back is quieter. Which ring is your worth in, the record's or yours? The heading answered a different question from the one on the board. It answered: what if someone comes after me?

That is the email at 10:00. It is a heading. It is doing protection while pretending to do communication. Protection may be part of your job. A folder that cannot stop is not protection. It is the alarm, keeping a file.

If you are unsafe, you use the school's own process, tonight. The three lines below are for the ordinary angry email, the one that ruins the night and is not an emergency. They are a way to answer a person without the folder that answers a court.

How do you respond to an angry parent email?

The form is a three-line reply. The order matters.

Before the first line, check the doorway. Which door is the email standing in? A Fight email argues, a Freeze email goes quiet, a Fawn email over-thanks, a Flight email wants out of the conversation. Read the moment, not the parent. Then slow your reply to match: shorter, calmer, one step. None of this goes in the reply, the portal, or the folder.

What I heard. The charge, in their words, short. Not what you wish they had said. You are showing you received the message. Reception is not agreement. Kim's fight wants to skip this line and start with the correction. If you skip it, the rest of the reply is a wall, and walls get climbed.

What is true. One or two sentences. Notebook voice. What happened, what you did, what the record shows. No adjective that prosecutes the parent. No adjective that prosecutes you. If a piece is the building's, a policy, a schedule, a grade that is already posted, say the piece without a speech about the policy. The speech is the attachment. The attachment is how the way she copes makes sure she cannot be wrong. She can still be clear without the PDF.

What I will do, and when. A real next step with a time. Or a real limit. "I can meet Thursday after school for 15 minutes." "I will not discuss another student." "The grade stands, and here is the one revision I will accept, by Friday." Then stop. The fourth paragraph is the one where you win. Winning is the alarm. The parent needed the next step. The student needed the temperature to drop. You needed to sleep.

In the chapter called Conferences, Kim deletes four paragraphs of policy and sends three lines. What I heard. What is true. What I will do and when. A father at another conference sits frozen and will not talk. Penny receives the silence, mirrors it, and waits. The same shape, in a room instead of a message. You do not fill the silence with your case. You let the other person arrive, and then you tell the truth you can stand, and then you name the next step.

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What does one message look like in three lines?

Picture a short one. The kind that says you do not care, the child is failing, and a call was not returned. The long draft in you already has the syllabus, the portal instructions, the list of missing work, and a paragraph about how many students you have. That draft is the folder. Set it aside and write only this.

What I heard: you are worried about the grade, and you did not get a call back.

What is true: I called Tuesday after school and missed you. The missing assignments are listed in the portal, on the class page.

What I will do, and when: I can talk Thursday for 15 minutes after the last bell, or you can send one other time this week. We can go through the grade on the call, not in email.

Then stop. No "as I am sure you understand." No count of how hard you work. The count is for your exhaustion, and it will not help their fear. Their fear may stay. The next step is on the calendar anyway. If the message that arrived was a threat, or a student is in danger, you are not in this example. You use your building's own process before you compose anything.

The tally mark Kim makes, one unsent folder, is a practice you can use. Each time the long draft goes into a folder instead of the send, mark the day. After a week the marks tell you whether the three lines are in your hands. Send one short reply. It will teach you more than another evening of editing the long one.

What if you put the sword down?

The overcorrection is predictable, and the book does not applaud it. Kim decides she is done fighting, so she stops answering parent email at all for a week. A parent named Mr. Bowers goes to the principal. The table's line is the one to keep. You can put the sword down and still hold the line.

Silence is not the three-line reply. Silence is the Flight way of coping turned inside out. The line is the third sentence, the one with a time and a limit. If you send nothing, you have not become peaceful. You have left the student and the parent in a hallway, and the hallway will find your principal. Hold the line in three sentences. Do not hold it in a folder, and do not drop it on the floor.

Later in the book she calls the parent she has been fighting by email. Listening first. That is a finish, not a script you have to perform this week. The week you have might only hold the three lines and a night you get back. Take the night. The call can be a later chapter, when you are not writing it in the shower.

Whose is the mood, and whose is the reply?

Circle 3 is the parent's mood, their history with school, what they say about you at a dinner you are not at, whether they believe you. You can write a perfect reply and still not control the belief. Stop adding paragraphs in pursuit of a belief you do not own.

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Circle 2 is the principal you loop in when your building's own process says to, the colleague who will read the draft and cross out the fourth paragraph, the counselor in the building if the student is the one in distress. Influence. Looping someone in is not the same as hiding behind them. Hiding is the attachment. A named next step is the line.

Circle 1 is the three sentences, the send, and the decision not to reread the thread at 11:00. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. The worth is in the send and the stop.

What do you do with the draft that is open now?

Strip it to three lines before you add anything. If you cannot say what you heard in one sentence, you are still prosecuting. Write that sentence first, even if it stings. Then the true piece, short. Then the next step and the time. Delete the attachments unless one of them is a thing the parent asked for and you already have. A policy packet is usually the sword. Put it down.

If the surge is in your hands, wait for one breath, then decide if it is morning work. There it is. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight. An email written in the shower is the alarm's genre. Morning Kim, with the tally mark already made, can send three lines. Midnight Kim sends the folder or sends nothing and calls both of those strength. Neither is the tool.

Do not check for their reply as a way to grade yourself. You sent the line. Their next mood is Circle 3. If you promised a time, keep the time. That is the floor. Everything after the time, the rereading, the imaginary hearing, the second follow-up you write so you will not be thought cold, is above the floor. You can put the sword down and still hold the line. Hold it once. Then make dinner, or sit in the room you live in.

The feeling that one hard word on a form made you a bad teacher, which is the cousin of this email, is on I feel like a bad teacher. The hours the thread steals from the evening are part of How to stop taking work home.

The opening is on the teachers page: 88 essays, 14 done, 74 to go, 37 more hours, and one word, *adequate*, near the bottom of an observation.

The book is the night Kim deletes four paragraphs and sends three lines.

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I feel like a bad teacher

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Tonight's move

Before you reply tonight, write one sentence that says what you heard them say, and nothing else.

What to do

Strip it to three lines before you add anything. If you cannot say what you heard in one sentence, you are still prosecuting. Write that sentence first, even if it stings. Then the true piece, short. Then the next step and the time. Delete the attachments unless one of them is a thing the parent asked for and you already have. A policy packet is usually the sword. Put it down.

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I feel like a bad teacher

I feel like a bad teacher. Teachers type it in the car, after a class that went fine and a note that stung. Often the feeling started with one line on an observation, and the line hired your pen. It arrives as a verdict. Most of it is weather.

Tonight, copy the observation note onto paper and underline the one line that is data. Just one.

If the note is mixed, with one fair line and three that sting, underline the fair one and put the rest in a drawer until you have slept. If it is all fog, take it to a person you trust in the building before you rebuild anything.

You sit with the observation PDF open on your phone in the car. You have a class that goes well and you cannot feel it. You can list what went wrong in under a minute. The list of what went right takes a prompt and still comes out qualified. "They were fine, but."

You reread an observation, or an email, or a comment from a walkthrough, looking for the sentence that will settle the case. You find a true sentence and a dozen others, and you give the dozen the same weight as the true one. The true one was enough to work with. The dozen were enough to ruin a week.

You compare your room to the room next door, which is quieter, or louder, or decorated, or not. The comparison always picks the axis you lose on. That is how you know it is not information. Information would sometimes go the other way.

A student likes you, and you treat the liking as a trick, or as proof you are not rigorous. A student does not like you, and you treat that as the real news. The alarm has a preferred headline. The headline is that you are getting away with something, or that you have been found out. It will take either story. It will not take "today was mixed, and the floor held."

You stay late to outrun the feeling. The staying does not retire it. The staying is the feeling, given a task. Shannon's task has been 30 comments a paper since a form used one word. The word was *adequate*. The comments are the appeal she files every night, to a reader who left the building years ago.

You are tired of being this person, and you are also, on Tuesdays, good at the work in ways the form did not measure. Both are in you. The page is about how to stop letting the unmeasured part be cross-examined by the measured one.

If your stomach just clenched, you are in the right room.

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If you have taken one hard word and given it the editing power of a whole career, you are in the right place. The word may have been partly true. The career is larger than the word. The tool is how you tell the part that is data from the part that is weather.

What do you do with one word near the bottom?

The prologue of *Stop Grading Your Sundays* puts Shannon in the faculty lot with 88 essays, 14 done, 74 to go, 37 more hours, and a rate she can do in her head. The rate has a birthday: nine years ago, one sentence near the bottom of an observation called her feedback adequate. The absence of a second sentence did not retire the first. The pen kept the correspondence going.

In the chapter called Sixth Period she finally sorts the observation notes. One line is data. The rest is noise. The book does not say the observation was fake, and it does not say the one line was kind. Data can sting. Data is the part you can do something about on Tuesday. Noise is the part that sounds like a verdict on the kind of teacher you are.

The sort has three piles.

Data. What happened, specific enough that a different adult in the room could have seen it. "Students did not get a chance to revise." "Three students had their heads down for the last 10 minutes." "The comment on the sample paper was a check mark." Data can be used. You can change Tuesday.

Mirror. The part that reflects the writer's fear, taste, or mood more than your room. "Energy was low." "Rigor was not evident." Sometimes a mirror has a splinter of data in it. Pull the splinter out and put it in the data pile, in concrete words. If you cannot make it concrete, it stays a mirror. You do not owe a mirror a new personality.

Noise. The rest. The tone. The adjective that cannot be acted on. The comparison to a teacher who is not you. The word that has been running your pen because it was written there, not because it is still true of this week's class. Noise gets no vote on your worth.

The sort starts with one question: am I regulated enough to hear this right now? Red, close it and run the breath. Yellow, read it once and answer within a day. Green, go ahead. A note does not get to call you a bad teacher in order to smuggle in a useful fact.

If a note is cruel, or if it is part of something heavier than a bad day, you do not decode your way into accepting it. You use the school's own process for that, and a person, not a worksheet.

What could the form not measure?

Shannon already had counter-evidence. A former student, now a public defender, wrote to say the only thing she put on his paper, *I want to hear more*, did what 30 comments never did. The form measured effort. He was reporting attention.

The facilitator does not pat Shannon and call the 30 comments love. Love, in that margin, had been recruited. The four words were the floor. Later she swings past the floor and gives a quiet student too little, and the table says so. The comment that matters is the floor. You can be a careful teacher and

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still be aiming the care at the old sentence. The sort is how you read the note without hiring it for the rest of your career.

Take it seriously. Do not take it personally. The table keeps that line for exactly this kind of note: one true piece, and a cloud around it.

Where do the three circles sit on one form?

Circle 3 is the form itself, the observer's mood, the rubric you did not write, what a student tells their parent, the fact that one sentence landed near the bottom and the rest of the form did not get a parade. You cannot erase it by staying later. You could not control the sentence then. You do not control it now.

Circle 2 is the colleague who will read the note with you and help you say the data in concrete words, the department conversation about what feedback is for, the follow-up you request if your workplace has a follow-up and you want it. Influence. A follow-up is not a second trial you conduct alone at midnight.

Circle 1 is the sort. Data, mirror, noise. The pen that stops answering a word that is no longer in the room. The four-word note you are willing to try on one paper this week, not as a brand, as a test. Worth lives in Circle 1. Nowhere else. Not in being the teacher no sentence can name, which is not a job that exists.

What do three lines from a form look like, sorted?

Say the note said three things. The comments on student work were brief. The room felt flat. You might consider more energy.

Line one can be data if you make it specific. Brief compared to what? If the sample they saw was a check mark where a student needed a sentence, that is data. Tuesday gets a floor comment, the way the four words were a floor. If "brief" is only an adjective and you cannot point at a paper, it is a mirror until you can.

Line two, the room felt flat, is a mirror until it grows a fact. Flat is the observer's weather. Maybe it matches a stretch where three students were asleep. The asleep students are data. The word flat is not a plan. You do not owe the word a new personality, a louder voice, or a show of enthusiasm you will hate by October. You owe the asleep students a change you can name, if the asleep students were real.

Line three, more energy, is noise if it cannot be done on a Tuesday, and it usually cannot. Energy is not a strategy. It is a request that you feel different so the back of the room feels different. Put it in the noise pile. Give it no vote. If you want a real change that sometimes reads as energy from the back, pick one action: you stand where they walk in, you ask one student the question you used to answer yourself, you stop talking for two minutes and let them. Those are Circle 1. "More energy" is a mood the form ordered. Moods do not obey forms.

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Then look at what you almost did, which is rewrite the whole week to satisfy all three lines. That rewrite is Shannon's 37 hours. It answers noise at the rate of a career. The sort leaves you with less to do, and the alarm hates having less to do, because less to do feels like being *adequate* again. Less to do, aimed at the one data line, is the practice. The other lines can sit in the noise pile where they cannot hold the pen.

What do you do with the form, or the email, or the voice?

Copy the note. Mark one line as data. If you cannot find one, the note may be all mirror and noise, and you are allowed to say so and get a person to look before you rebuild your practice around a fog. If you find one, write the Tuesday change in a single sentence. Not a new philosophy. "Revision time, 10 minutes, before they hand it in." Then do that, and do not do the other 14 improvements the noise suggested.

Say the word out loud once, as a word, not as a name. *Adequate.* Or whatever your word is. A word you can hear is smaller than a word that lives in the pen. Shannon's pen has been answering it in the margins ever since. The answer did not retire it. Naming it as one line of data, and refusing the rest, is the retirement the form will never send you.

One paper, four true words, this week. Not a void. A floor. If the student needed more, add the sentence and stop. The page on the long margin is Why grading takes so long. The page on the email that uses the same courtroom is The angry parent email. They are the same alarm in two uniforms. You do not have to solve both tonight.

The opening is on the teachers page.

The book is Shannon in sixth period, one line of the observation kept, the rest set down.

Be first to know when *Stop Grading Your Sundays* is out

If this is keeping you from sleeping or eating, or it is not easing, talk to your EAP or a clinician. If it has gone darker than that, or you are having thoughts of not wanting to be here, call or text 988 in the US, any hour.

More reasons

Teacher Sunday scaries

How to stop taking work home

Why grading takes so long

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When the book is out.

Stop Grading Your Sundays

Come home after the bell

Get notified

Be first to know when Stop Grading Your Sundays is out. We write once, when that book is out.

circle1living.com/notify#teachers

Send it to a friend

The person still grading at the kitchen table. Send this page. They can read it without an account.

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