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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Tonight's move

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

What to do

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Stop Grading Your Sundays

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

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