GETTING STARTED
The 40 Hour Teacher Workweek Club

CHOOSE A TARGET NUMBER OF HOURS AND STICK TO IT

Welcome to the 40HTW Club! Before the club begins, you’ll want to explore:

- How I chose a 40 hour workweek and scheduled my time
- How to choose your own target baseline number of hours
- How to pick an adjusted target number each week
- How to allot your hours throughout the week in a schedule that works for your life
I chose 40 hours as my target each week for completing all mandatory tasks, including instructional time with students, meetings, hall/recess duties, lesson plan documentation, making photocopies, filing, grading papers, managing homework, analyzing data, returning parent emails/calls, committee responsibilities, etc.

Most of the time, I was able to stick to that number. There’s nothing magical about the number 40. It’s just the number that I felt was reasonable for me. And today, I want to share how I chose that number and help you choose a number that works for YOU.

How I chose my target number of hours

When my students’ hours were 8:00-2:30, my contractual hours were 7:30-3:00. That’s a required 7.5 hour day for teachers, 6.5 hours for students. The kids had a 30 minute lunch break and 30 minutes for special classes daily, so my instructional time was around 5.5 hours a day.

Contractual hours: 7.5 hours x 5 days per week = 37.5 hours per week
   - Instructional time: 5.5 hours x 5 days per week = 27.5 hours per week

10 hours to get teaching tasks done while “on the clock”

I decided to make a concrete plan for using those 10 hours wisely, because a lot of it was being eaten up by meetings, laminator malfunctions, impromptu conferences with parents, and so on. (More about this later.)

So I had my 37.5 hour contractual week, and added another 2.5 hours for working before and after school on my own time for a total of 40 hours per week.

That said, teaching is my passion! I enjoy finding and sharing ideas online. I love creating elaborate activities and curriculum materials instead of using the materials the school provides or a simple version that I could create more quickly. I love to decorate and organize the classroom until things are exactly the way that I want them. I didn’t count those tasks as part of my 40 hours because they aren’t required to the extent that I do them, and I don’t WANT to limit the time I spend on them. They’re the creative side of teaching that I gladly pursue, like a hobby.

If you LOVE spending hours making things for your classroom from scratch like I did, you might not want to count those tasks in your target number. Instead, focus on setting boundaries around how much time you allow for mandatory tasks, which will free you up to do the fun, creative stuff as often as you’d like!
If your bigger priority is cutting back on everything school related so you can achieve better work/life balance, your target number SHOULD include voluntary tasks so you don’t allow yourself to work too many unnecessary hours.

Choose a target number that makes sense and is sustainable for YOU! The target number is simply to help you create boundaries and be intentional with your time. Start by estimating how many hours you work currently, and choose a target number that’s 3-5 hours less than that.

**How I allotted my time and created a sustainable schedule**

Since my contractual hours were 7:30-3:00 and my students’ hours were 8:00-2:30, I had a half an hour before and after school as a prep or planning period.

I knew I needed a little more time before school to get ready for the day--a full hour would be ideal, especially since I’m not a morning person and need time to fully wake up before two dozen rambunctious eight-year-olds come bustling through my door.

I also knew I’d be exhausted after school and would want to leave as soon as possible. Usually when I stay late, I end up talking to my colleagues or doing stuff online because it’s the only chance I’ve had to sit down all day. By the time that’s done, it’s nearly 4:00, and I’ve been in the classroom for an hour longer than I needed to be without getting anything accomplished that couldn’t have been done at home. So, staying late isn’t the best use of time for me, personally.

For those reasons, I decided I wanted to arrive at school at 7:00 am (giving myself a full hour before school without the kids) and leave by 3:00 pm (which meant I had a half an hour after dismissal to work.) That’s 90 minutes of prep time total before and after school, plus about 30 minutes for lunch and 30 minutes of planning time during (most) school days.

Theoretically, that’s around 3 hours a day to get my stuff done on days when I didn’t have meetings. Of course, the 3 hours weren’t all kid-free time: sometimes students would come in the classroom a few minutes before the first bell, my planning period was often cancelled, and dismissal could take as long as 20 minutes at the end of the day.

But I wasn’t responsible for instruction during those 3 hours, so not only did I plan to get my work done even with students in the room, I planned routines that put THEM to work as my helpers so I got even more accomplished than I would have on my own!

I figured if I worked efficiently and intentionally, the hours of 7-3 would be manageable and would be the best way to structure my 40 hours.
How to pick a baseline for YOUR target number of hours

It’s important to pick a realistic target number to work toward, knowing that you can decrease that number slowly over time as you establish more productive work habits.

Avoid choosing your target baseline number by thinking about how many hours you need in order to get everything done. Why? Because you could work 100 hours and still have stuff left on your to-do list. Teaching is like parenting: it’s a never-ending job, and there’s always something more you could be doing.

Instead of thinking about how many hours you need to be a good teacher, frame your thinking in terms of how many hours you need for your LIFE. Think about all the stuff that’s most important in the big picture: family, friends, spiritual growth, exercise, eating well, sleeping, relaxation, hobbies, and so on.

Ask yourself: How much more time would I need in a day to make my life feel less stressful and busy?

Not stress-free, of course, but less stressful. Start small. Would ONE extra hour a day make a small difference in the amount of rushing you do after school to get errands done, or give you some time to play outside with your own kids in the evenings?

If one extra hour a day would help, figure out how many hours per week you’re working on average right now, and subtract 5 from it (one hour per weekday.)

This is your baseline target number.

If that number seems impossible or scary, subtract 3 hours from your current total instead of 5. You can lower your target number slowly over time as you monitor your progress and develop more efficient, productive routines.

Be flexible & adjust your baseline target number each week

Most people feel stressed out, anxious, or disappointed in themselves when they don’t meet their goals. When you work more than your target number of hours, you might feel discouraged, and if too many weeks pass without you meeting the goal, you might feel like giving up and start slipping back into old, unproductive habits.

Here’s how to avoid that.

I recommend evaluating your target number of hours on a week-by-week basis. Sit down on the weekend (I like Sunday nights for this) and look at the obligations you have for work and your personal life. Then create a schedule that meets those needs.
If report cards are due and the science fair is on Friday, increase your target number of hours the week. If your daughter’s birthday party is on Sunday, decrease your target number of hours, and don’t feel one bit guilty about it. You can always plan to stay late at work next week to catch up if needed. Family first!

Though you won’t be able to anticipate all the demands that will come at you throughout the week, you should be able to set a realistic baseline number of hours and adjust it for what’s on your calendar. You can even give yourself permission to revise your target number mid-week if emergencies crop up.

Your adjusted target number each week will be slightly different, but it will still be useful for you, even it’s 60 hours! That’s because you are intentionally creating boundaries around your time.

**Creating boundaries around your time is NOT a one-time decision**

Work will expand to fill every spare minute that you allow. So you must be aware of how much time you’re working, and how much time you’re willing to work.

**Choose to continually monitor your productivity and the demands on your time, adjust accordingly, and decide every day that you will reinforce boundaries.**

Think of it like exercising, eating healthy, getting sufficient sleep, or staying connected with your spiritual life. You can’t think about this stuff once and then forget about it! You must make choices, hour by hour, that move you toward your goal.

**When you make an unhealthy choice, it’s okay–just make a better choice in the next hour.** Resist the urge to write off an entire day or week or month, simply because you’ve wasted time or gotten “too far” out of balance. Choose in this moment to get back on track. Then choose it again in the next hour, and the hour after that.

This creates a positive forward momentum so that a bit of “backsliding” does not derail you completely. Over time, you will have practiced making more healthy, productive choices than unhealthy ones, and your life will feel more balanced.

**How to adjust your schedule for this week’s target number**

As you adjust your **target baseline** number to create a realistic **adjusted target number for the coming week**, you will also need to choose your schedule. Do not go into school on Monday morning without a plan! Otherwise, you’ll have used up your allotted work hours long before the week is over.

On the weekend when you pick your target number for the week ahead, look over all your appointments, errands, social events, and so on. Then figure out how to best allocate your work hours.
I think you’ll find that it’s much less tiring to do school work on your own time when you have clear boundaries around how much of your personal life you are willing to sacrifice. It’s depressing to sit down with a huge stack of papers to grade on Sunday night when you have no idea how long it’s going to take you to get through them.

But if you know that you have carved 2 hours of your weekend schedule to disappear into a quiet room of your house (or local coffee shop/library) to have focused, undistracted grading time, the goal feels much more do-able.

You’ll also work faster and with more focus: the boundaries on your time create a sense of urgency. You won’t be as tempted to waste time checking social media or flipping through the TV. You know you have a short, non-overwhelming period of time to be productive, and then you can enjoy the rest of your day.

Here are some boundaries other teachers have placed on their work hours:

- Go to school 2 hours early every day, and leave when the students leave in the afternoon, taking no work home.
- Work 9 hours on Monday and Wednesday, and 8 hours on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.
- Stay 1 hour late every day, and work at home from 8:00 pm-10:00 pm three days a week.
- Work only contractual hours from Monday–Friday, and then work at home from 7 am–1 pm on Saturday.
- Arrive an hour early every weekday morning, and stay 3 hours late on Friday to prepare for the coming week.
- Work for 3 hours every Monday evening to prepare for the week ahead, and stay one hour late Tues–Fri.

Giving yourself the freedom to choose and follow a schedule that works for your life is empowering. It gives you a sense of control over how your time is used and ensures the most important tasks get done.

And if the schedule doesn’t work? Choose a different allotment for your hours the next week. Over time, you’ll find systems that work for you, and get better and better at sticking to your target number.

Get started with the planning sheets on the next two pages!
Choose the Hours for YOUR Workweek!

1) Find your baseline target number

This is how many hours per week you want to try to work this month/quarter.

- ______ Estimated number of hours I work each week, on average
- ______ Realistic number of extra hours I’d like to have right away (I recommend starting with 3-5, just enough time to make life slightly less stressful/rushed)
= ______ My baseline target number

2) Adjust your baseline target number for the demands of this coming week

You may want to work more than your baseline target number this week if you need to catch up on projects or have big deadlines approaching.

You might want to work less than your baseline target number this week if you have more family or personal events and obligations.

***If you’re not sure how many extra hours you need to allot to your work or personal life, it might be helpful to use the planning sheet on the next page.***

I am planning to work ______ more / fewer ______ hours this week than my baseline target number:

- ______ My baseline target number
+ ______ Additional hours I want to allot to work this week

OR

- ______ Additional hours I want to allot to my personal life this week
= ______ My adjusted target number for this week

As you can see, these are very easy calculations to do. After the first time, you’ll be able to figure out your adjusted target number in your head each week automatically. Or, use the planning sheet on the next page.
Simple Work Hour Planner

For the Week of __________________________

How much time are you willing and able to dedicate to work this week? You can fill in the blanks first, and then add everything up to create an adjusted target number.

Or, pick your adjusted target number first and work backward, filling in the blanks to distribute the hours throughout the week as you see fit.

Then use this plan to help you stick to your adjusted target number this week!

Mon:        ____ hours before school     ____ hours after school    ____ hours at home
Tue:         ____ hours before school     ____ hours after school    ____ hours at home
Wed:        ____ hours before school     ____ hours after school    ____ hours at home
Thurs:      ____ hours before school     ____ hours after school    ____ hours at home
Fri:           ____ hours before school     ____ hours after school    ____ hours at home
Sat:          ____ hours at home
Sun:         ____ hours at home

_________ Contractual work hours
+ _________ Additional voluntary work hours (from above)
= _________ ADJUSTED TARGET NUMBER

Notes:
Simple Work Hour Planner

For the Week of October 1

How much time are you willing and able to dedicate to work this week? You can fill in the blanks first, and then add everything up to create an adjusted target number.

Or, pick your adjusted target number first and work backward, filling in the blanks to distribute the hours throughout the week as you see fit.

Then use this plan to help you stick to your adjusted target number this week!

Mon: 0.5 hours before school  ___ hours after school  ___ hours at home
Tue: ___ hours before school  2 ___ hours after school  ___ hours at home
Wed: ___ hours before school  ___ hours after school  ___ hours at home
Thurs: ___ hours before school  2 ___ hours after school  ___ hours at home
Fri: ___ hours before school  ___ hours after school  ___ hours at home
Sat: 3 ___ hours at home
Sun: 1.5 ___ hours at home

___38___ Contractual work hours
+ ___9___ Additional voluntary work hours (from above)
= ___47___ ADJUSTED TARGET NUMBER

Notes:

No taking work home in the evening after school this week!