

101 Essential Lists on Assessment by Tabatha Rayment, and 101 Essential Lists for Secondary Teachers by Susan Elkin Continuum, £8.99; 100 Ideas for Surviving Your First Year in Teaching, by Laura-Jane Fisher, Continuum, £8.99; How to be a successful teacher, by Sue Leach, Continuum, £8.99; The Naked Teacher by Louisa Leaman

When you're a teacher, your life often seems to be measured out in lists. Whilst my flashier colleagues frequently whip out an electronic organiser to check on meetings and appointments, I still rely on a battered old notebook on which I list the main tasks I inevitably end up not completing each day – a life reduced to bullet-points. From registers to learning objectives, it's hard to imagine a teacher's life as listless. So why would we pay good money to a publisher to give us more lists?

I'm suspicious of other people's lists ever since my favourite cookery writer filled a 2000-word column with a list of everything he'd eaten and drunk over the previous year. It felt like lazy writing to me. However, the "word" essential" is enticing in any title, so let's see what's on offer.

In the case of Susan Elkin's book, I'm not sure where many of her lists get us. Perhaps it's useful to have to hand a list of teacher union addresses or essential items for cover lessons. These are certainly relevant in the nitty-gritty of school life. But I'm less convinced I need a list of holiday ideas ("camp or caravan with the children in France") or ways of making moonlighting money ("maker of quiches for the local health food shop"). I agree that a short story might, in adversity, be useful for the cover lesson where no work has been left, but the list of six suggested stories really ought to be heading short and old stories as all are in anthologies that have been around for at least 20 years.

Tabatha Rayment's lists of assessment ideas are more interesting and unexpected, reminding us of the variety of ways in which students might be assessed. The book takes a surprisingly broad view of assessment, however. List 9 lists ways of motivating students whilst list 97 has a list of "what makes a good teacher" ("a genuine interest in helping their students"). It's not ground-breaking, but there are plenty of useful tips and reassuring advice.

Best of this bunch is Laura-Jane Fisher's 100 Ideas. Here she frequently clambors onto the moral high-ground, telling us to beware of drinking too much midweek and making sure you use Sundays for something productive rather than succumbing too early in the day to the Sunday evening blues. This might make you shrink in anticipated fear of being patronised, but in fact the writer's style is one of reassurance rather than finger-wagging, and much of her advice eminently sensible. I liked the reminder to have a spare pen ready for the inevitable pupil who has forgotten to bring one; to sharpen your understanding of children's behaviour by watching Super Nanny; and her practical hints on dealing with stress.

Then we're onto books that have little to do with lists. Sue Leach's How to be a Successful Secondary Teacher is a more traditional book, written in sentences and

paragraphs, not subdivided into numerically-ordered ideas, and – overall – it's very good. It starts with the realistic assertion that many of us were taught by teachers for whom relationships with pupils were a key consideration and going on to map out some of the essential ingredients in good teachers (for example, commitment to the learning of **every** child and not being locked into conventional notions of ability).

There's a particularly good section on the artificial compartmentalisation of the curriculum into subjects, and the author argues persuasively that the subject and modularisation approach does more harm than good. For that point alone, I admired the book. But it also illustrates that this is no simple tips-for-teachers tome. It's a thoughtful and thought-provoking introduction to the issues every new teacher needs to know about – behaviour management, literacy, lesson planning, and many other topics.

Louisa Leaman's The Naked Teacher wins the prize for the most eye-catching and possibly gratuitous title. It has a rather jaunty, conversational tone that soon got on my nerves; but then I'm a seasoned veteran of schools who's probably resistant to such enthusiastic burlblings as this description of school life: "Oh, and there are children. Everywhere. Lots of them".

But when you cut through the froth, the advice in the book is very assured, very practical. There's guidance on lesson planning, on assessment, on behaviour management and maintaining your stamina. It's a good, accessible read, packed with genuinely practical advice, and clearly written by someone who knows the ins and outs of classroom life.

In all of this, as in all books for teachers, you have to follow your instincts. If it's lists and 'essential' advice you want, then there's plenty of choice. If you want something more developed and reflective, then Leach and Leaman serve it up. If you aren't sure which to buy, make yourself a shopping list.

Geoff Barton is headteacher at King Edward VI School, Suffolk.