If you’ve taught before, or even just been a student before (which I trust all ProfHacker readers have been), you know that the first week of the semester (or quarter) is not like the rest of the weeks to come. This means that, however your first week played out, it is not predictive of the next three months.

But it’s easy to forget that you’ve been through the first week of the term before. Maybe a better one, maybe a worse one. But you got through it and probably don’t even remember it all that clearly any longer. Here are a few of the reasons why whatever happened last week (or will happen next week, depending on your calendar) is unique to the first week of the term.

Everyone’s routines just changed.
Chances are pretty good that even if you live a very structured life, your daily routine changes during the semester according to your teaching schedule. You might be waking up, commuting, eating, and working at different times than you did all summer. If you live with other people (especially children), their schedules have probably changed as well.

Your students, too, are experiencing schedule changes during the first week of the semester. The kind and scope of those changes may vary depending on whether your student population is largely residential or commuter-based, but either way, students are adjusting to new routines just as much, if not more, than are faculty.

Something will malfunction.
I think it’s a rule that some piece of equipment will not work as expected during the first week of classes, whether it’s your car, the department photocopier, the gate in the parking garage, or the classroom media projector.

But whatever malfunctions, it’s also true that you’ve got a couple of months to recover from whatever mishaps occur in your classroom during the first week. So just breathe deeply and figure out a temporary work-around.
“Should I stay or should I go?” is the first week’s theme song.

Although some students have been registered for your course since the spring, others have only decided to try to get into it five minutes ago. Those who attended the first day may or may not reappear on the second day. The second or third day of class may bring you yet more new faces. This can be frustrating or confusing for all involved, but soon add/drop will close and you’ll know who is actually going to stay in the class.

You didn’t sleep well.

Whether it’s from excitement or anxiety, many instructors don’t sleep very soundly the night before a new class. Some don’t sleep soundly the night after. Just recognizing the fact that you’re not the only person who has that dream about walking into class and not having your materials (or realizing your students are all squid-like extra-terrestrials) can help you relax about it.

You’ve just met a bunch of new people.

For some people, suddenly being immersed in a chaotic, busy, social environment is invigorating after long summer hours in the library or lab. For others, it’s kind of overwhelming. In either case, you’re busy trying to learn student names and reconnect with your colleagues. But just think: in about three months, you’ll be counting down the days until the term ends and you can get away from everyone again.

The first week has a bright energy all its own. Just hang on and enjoy it. The term about to unfold is full of possibilities — all of them undecided right now — and the one thing you can be sure of is that the weeks ahead will not be just like the first one.