

First Day of Class– Some Strategies

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Building Community

Getting to know your students:

- Get to class early, walk around and ask students for their names and a couple of facts about themselves – e.g. majors, hobbies, what class they have just come from, what their career or education goals are, etc.
- Greet each student if you can (if it's a small enough class)
- Have students complete a questionnaire about themselves: e.g. (this was suggested for use in classes that include international students):
 - Name:
 - Email:
 - Hometown:
 - Hobbies/Interests:
 - Briefly describe yourself and career aspirations:
 - What is your most memorable [subject] experience?
 - What are your strengths and weaknesses in [subject]?
 - What will you do to be successful in the class?
 - What do you need from your class members and/or from your instructor to help you to be successful in this class?
 - Choose a number [or whatever is relevant to the course] that is important to you and explain its significance.
 - Who or what motivates you to pursue your dreams?

Have students get to know each other and create foundations for a collaborative and cooperative classroom community

Do a name-learning ice-breaker: e.g.:

- In a small class, have students sit in a circle and student 1 tells the group their name; student 2 says student 1's name and their name, student three says student 1 and 2's names and then their own name; continue through the group – so the last student has to say the names of all the students
- In a large class, have students write their names on stickers and wear them, and then whenever a student speaks, they have to say their name and use the names of the other students they refer to.
- Have students in small groups introduce themselves to each other and then in smaller classes, students can introduce each other to the whole class ; or in a much larger class rearrange the small groups into new groups and ask students to introduce themselves and those from their first group to the new group.
- Set up a course related group activity/task (see the Lang (2024) article for ideas about different disciplines)

Having students get to know you

- Towards the end of the class, have students write down how they feel (in words or phrases); collect what they have written and list them on the board. Then ask: "How do you think your teacher feels?" then list their responses in a second column so that they may see parallels.
- Have students in small groups come up with a team name, do a trivia quiz about the syllabus, and/or discuss aspects of the syllabus that they would like to see changed, then share the ideas with the whole class. As instructor, note down students' ideas and then explain (at that time or the next day, to give you time to explore ideas) what can be changed and what cannot.
- Have students discuss the syllabus in groups. Then one student from each group interviews the instructor to get answers to questions.
- Tell the students what kinds of things you are going to give them to help them be successful – learning strategies, materials, assignment support, etc.
- Show how you are going to be flexible and empathetic – e.g. tell them you will accept one late arrival at class for each of them, ask if they want you to drop their lowest (quiz, assignment, or other) grade or give them extra credit opportunities at the end of the course.

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Setting Expectations

Create curiosity about and motivation for the course

- Spark students' curiosity about the content of the course by asking them a question or setting a task that they will only be able to answer or do at the end of the course. Then show how aspects of the course will help them achieve that knowledge and the skills.
- Show how the content can help them achieve the course objectives and be successful in assignments
- Ask students to think about what learning strategies they could use to be successful in the course, and what support they need from you and/or each other to make those strategies effective. This will result in actively engaging students in learning on day 1 in the ways they will use later.
- Give students an opportunity to ask and get responses for questions about the shape of the course, materials they will need to buy or use, tests, projects, assignments, etc. This allows students to be able to decide if they stay in the course or not.
- Discussion of the objectives of the course will help students understand your vision for the course
- Do on day 1 what you will do in classes in the semester. E.G. engaged lectures, student group problem solving, discussion, etc. activities; have students write paragraphs, etc.

Three Boards Activity: (de Luse, 2018)

1. Ask students to talk about and then note down (in single words or short phrases) their concerns, fears, etc. about the course on first “board” 1 (whiteboard, flip chart, etc.)
2. Elicit students' hopes, goals and intentions about the course; record these on board 2.
3. Then share your ideas about what makes for effective activities, behaviors and collaborations in class to help them achieve their goals and overcome their fears, etc. (this depends on the discipline and type of class and could include: group discussion community/ lab and safe lab behaviors/writing assignments /skills /ethics / mindsets for research/etc. Document these on board 3.)

NB: The de Luse article has a lot more detail about each stage, including scripts of what could be said

Resources used for these suggestions

deLuse, S. (2018). First Impressions: Using a Flexible First Day Activity to Enhance Student Learning and Classroom Management. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 30(2), 308-321

Hermann, A. D., & Foster, D. A. (2008). Fostering approachability and classroom participation during the first day of class: Evidence for a reciprocal interview activity. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9(2), 139-151.

Chronicle of Higher Education Articles

- ▶ [How to Teach a Good First Day of Class](#)
- ▶ [6 Ideas to Perk Up Your First Day of Class](#)

Podcast Faculty Focus:

https://www.facultyfocus.com/faculty-focus-live-podcast/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm