

Strategies for the First Day of Class

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Typical First Day of Class Activities

- Take attendance
- Read the syllabus
- Introduce the first topic (maybe)
- Give the first assignment (maybe)
- Focus on the DOS and DON'TS (with consequences)
- End class early?



What's Happening on the First Day?

- Students ARE forming lasting impression of you as a teacher
- Students ARE forming lasting impression of the course and its subject matter
- Students are making judgments which will determine the effort they will put into
 - their relationship with you
 - their relationship with their peers
 - learning the course material



On the First Day of Class You Can...

- Create a positive first impression— professional attire, arrive early and greet students, introduce yourself and provide qualifications to teach the course, tell students how to address you, share some personal information
- Help students learn about each other
- Ignite students' interest in the course and its topics
- Demonstrate to students that your class is an inclusive environment



Four Key Concepts for the First Day of Class

- Ignite students' curiosity
- Build community
- Set expectations
- Start the learning process



Write the Text Book Activity

- **How:**

- Students individually write a list of topics they think might be in a textbook with course's title
- Students are paired and put their lists into categories and give categories names
- Two or more pairs join, combine ideas, and create a table of contents for the book
- Groups share lists (white board, chart paper, etc.)
- Discuss

- **Why:**

- Instructor understands students' knowledge base-exposes potential misconceptions
- Students feel instructor cares
- Students interact with peers
- Piques interest in topic
- Students understand they have relevant knowledge



Spark Curiosity:

Prior Knowledge Activity

- **How:**
 - Prepare questions, problem, activity—think student perspective
 - Individual, pair, small groups
 - Bring it back to the whole class
 - Follow up
- **Why:**
 - Benchmark
 - Refresher
 - Bridge
 - Sparks interest
 - Introduces types of learning activities

Lang, J. How to Teach a Good First Day of Class. Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-teach-a-good-first-day-of-class/>



Build Community:

*Develop class protocols
and guidelines*

- **How :**
 - Pairs/small groups
 - Students reflect on prior course discussions
 - Students develop guidelines/protocols
 - Bring it back to the whole class
 - Follow up

- **Why:**
 - Ownership
 - Motivating
 - Engage in course immediately



Start Learning:

Challenge and Solutions

- **How:** Ask your students to think from a metacognitive perspective:
 - What one thing do you think might be most challenging for you in our course?
 - How do you plan to overcome that challenge?
 - Individual, pair, small groups
 - Bring it back to the whole class
 - Follow up
- **Why:**
 - Proactively overcome challenges
 - Peer motivation
 - Engage in course immediately



Highlight Expectations:

Syllabus/ Getting Started quiz

- **How:**
 - Develop questions in a Canvas quiz. Think about FAQ, confusing areas, how to connect to their own learning objectives.
 - You can include all sorts of questions - Think how to personalize
 - When: first day in pairs or groups **or** homework first week
- **Why:**
 - Emphasize most important aspects: policies, course structure, major dates, etc
 - Familiarizes with Canvas
 - Engage in course immediately
 - Motivating

Nilson, L. (2016) *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors.*



Getting to Know You:

Student Interviews

- **How:**
 - Pair up students (or let them do it themselves), and each student will introduce their partner to the class after a 5-10 minute interview period.
 - Information to share:
 - Name
 - Hometown
 - Major
 - Unique fact about themselves
- **Why:**
 - Works well for gen ed courses in order to foster connections and begin establishing a learning community.
 - Students do better when they connect with other students, *and* they are often reluctant to introduce themselves and speak on the first day.
 - If they have a buddy, they won't ask you.



Getting to Know Me:

Teacher Interviews

- **How:**
 - Put students in small groups or pairs
 - Students introduce themselves to each other
 - Each group comes up with two questions to ask the instructor
 - Collect the questions and answer them
- **Why:**
 - Students get to know the instructor
 - Makes the instructor a human being instead of the sage on the stage
 - Instructor gets to discuss why they enjoy teaching that subject



Getting It Right:

Class reflection on success strategies

- **How:**
 - Review the course essentials, and in a discussion get them to discuss items like:
 - What will make a student successful in the class?
 - What will cause a student not to do well?
 - What are the students' responsibilities?
 - What are the instructor's responsibilities?
 - Consider issues like attendance, study habits, classroom etiquette.
- **Why:**
 - If they articulate what will make them successful, that puts responsibility on *them* while detailing (and clarifying) the instructor's responsibilities.



Dive Right In:

Group Learning Activities

An effective way to ease students back into school (and keep them talking to each other) is to have them do a group activity dealing with class material. Here are some examples of activities for various types of courses.

Math: share visual demonstrations or proofs of familiar concepts

Biology Lab: conduct a simple demonstration or explore a curious anomaly

History: interpret a brief archival document

Sociology: discuss social explanations for putatively individual problems

Political Science: in small groups, read a short text for critical bias

Any course: have students fill out a brief, fun quiz on the course topic. This becomes a basis for discussing common misconceptions or important concepts.

<https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/pre-semester-intro/first-day-plan/#group>



Tips for Starting the Semester Inclusively

- If you believe every student can succeed, tell them!
 - 'I have high standards and I believe you can reach them'
 - Equity doesn't mean easy, it means everyone feels welcome gets a fair chance
 - Don't talk about 'Learning Gaps'
- Get to know your students
 - And let your students get to know you!
 - Start building relationships and trust



Provide as much support as you're comfortable

- Talk to students about what it takes to succeed in your course
 - What will you be requiring them to do?
 - What are successful study / project planning strategies?
- Talk about 'how to college'
 - Remember that Sophomores missed lots of the 'college learning experience'
 - Give access to campus resources
 - Talk about times you've used campus resources and how they helped



Use the syllabus to make a good first impression

- The syllabus often introduces you to your students
- Pay attention to tone and language
 - Who are you as an instructor?
 - How do you want students to feel about your course?
 - Are those accurately conveyed by your syllabus?
- Review your course policies
 - Will they turn students off?
 - Will they leave students behind?
 - Do you actually enforce them as written?



Things to consider if teaching Hybrid / Hyflex courses

- How do you make all students feel included?
 - Build in breaks for questions specifically from online students
 - Use the Chat feature
 - Try to avoid mixing in-person & online students in small group discussions
- Encourage, but don't require, cameras for online students
- It's difficult to balance encouraging in-person attendance with providing flexibility



Center for Transformative Teaching

Fall 2021 Workshop Schedule

- Engaging Environmental Justice Through Art Objects- August 16, 2:00
- Moving Forward with Equity-August 17, 10:00
- Using the Canvas Grade Book-September
- Getting Started with UDL in 20 Minutes-September
- An Introduction to Backward Design-October 7, 11:00
- The Science of Teaching: How to Take a Scholarly Approach to Your Own Classroom-October 15, 2:00
- Finding and Implementing OERs-November
- The Anti-Cheating Environment: Encouraging Academic Integrity-November



Resources

- Find your friendly neighborhood instructional designer: <https://teaching.unl.edu/contact-us/>
- Lang, J. How to Teach a Good First Day of Class. Published in Chronicle of Higher Education on August 21, 2018. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-teach-a-good-first-day-of-class/>
- Nilson, L. (2016) *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*. 4th ed.
- Plan the First Day's Lesson (n.d.). *Teaching Guide for GSIs*. <https://gsi.berkeley.edu/gsi-guide-contents/pre-semester-intro/first-day-plan/#group>



Eval link: <https://go.unl.edu/firstday21-22>

