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/](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

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.
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/


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