

## **Tips for Teaching on the First Day of Class<sup>1</sup> -- edited**

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*Take time to plan carefully what you will do on the first day in order to give students a clear impression of the course content and your expectations. If you plan to lecture on most days, lecture on the first day; if you plan to engage students in discussions, do so on the first day. No matter what methods you use, your overall aim should be to engage your students in learning.*

### **Arrive early.**

Chat with students before class starts. Interacting with students in this way will make them more likely to participate in class and to ask questions. Make sure that the room is ready and set up any necessary equipment. It is also important to visit the classroom at least a week in advance to check on seating arrangements, to see how the equipment works, and, not least important, to be sure you know where the classroom is.

### **Introduce yourself.**

Put your name and the course title on the board. Tell the students who you are and what you do.

### **Explain the course organization, requirements, major assignments, and policies.**

Students will feel more comfortable if you are organized and prepared. Having a well-written, detailed syllabus ready to hand out on the first day is essential. Mention course pre-requisites if there are any. Talk about the workload of the course, e.g., number of exams, number and length of papers, number of books to read. Review your office hours and contact information. Take the time to explain in detail all policies, including those regarding attendance, academic integrity, grades, and requests for extensions or rescheduling of quizzes and exams. Make clear to students their responsibility to adhere to the [college's policy on academic integrity](#) as well as the actions you will take if they do not. At the same time, indicate that you will answer any questions that they may have about such issues as how to attribute credit for borrowed ideas and how to distinguish between individual and collaborative work.

### **Explain your expectations for class participation.**

Give students a sense of your teaching style and your expectations for their involvement. If attendance and class participation are required, make that clear to the students and let them know how you will keep track of attendance (and whether they are permitted to miss any classes without penalty), as well as whether and how you will grade participation. It is also helpful to explain to students *why* you value attendance and participation.

### **Create interest in the course material.**

A successful first day will leave students interested in taking the course and learning the material. Present your vision, or overview, of the course. Relate the course topic to current

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applications or experiences. Communicate to the students your sense of why the topic should be studied and understood.

**“Build a sense of community” and set a positive tone.**

As Barbara Gross Davis points out, if you “build a sense of community,” students will perform better because they will feel connected to the class and to the instructor (20). Try to learn your students’ names; several of the references listed below give suggestions on how to accomplish this task, even in large classes. Students appreciate instructors who are fair and objective, who have an understanding attitude toward student concerns, who show passion for their course and their subject, and who display a willingness to work in a course.

**Plan to use at least one of the teaching methods you will use during the course.**

Prepare a brief lecture or a focused discussion that will demonstrate to students at least one of the teaching methods you will use. For example, if you want the students to be active learners—by participating in discussions, asking questions, or engaging in group work, you should conduct activities on that first day that encourage the students be active—to discuss, to ask questions, or to work in groups. If you plan to use small-group discussions in the course, it is especially important that you do so on the first day. This strategy will help you prompt students to talk to each other and practice collaborative learning from the start.

**Provide an opportunity for students to ask questions.**

Try to answer the questions that students bring into the class. Keep in mind that some of these questions may be “unspoken,” such as “should I take this course?” and “how difficult will this course be?” (see Lieberg, below). In smaller courses, consider requiring each student to submit a question about the course—in class, via email, or on an online discussion board such as that which is available on Moodle. Online discussion boards are particularly useful for this purpose because they allow the entire class to see all of the questions and your answers.

**Links and References for Teaching on the First Day of Class**

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Felder, Richard, “Getting Started.” *Chemical Engineering Education*, 29.3. (1995). 166-167. <http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/Columns/Getstart.html>.

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“The First Day of Class: What Can/Should We Do?” Instructional Development Program. University of Oklahoma. <http://www.ou.edu/idp/tips/ideas/design4.html>.

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McKeachie, Wilbert, et al. *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*. 12th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

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Royse, David. *Teaching Tips for College and University Instructors: A Practical Guide*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2001.