

Appendix A: Ten Things to Make the First Day Successful

Ten Things to Make the First Day (and the Rest) of the Semester Successful

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I like to arrive in the classroom well before the students. It gives me time to get things organized. I create an entrance table (I use chairs or desks if there's no table) that holds handouts for students to pick up. From day one the students learn the routine: they arrive, pick up handouts on the entrance table, and read the screen for instructions. They know what to do, and it saves time. Here's how I recommend introducing the routine on day one.

1. Post your name and the name and section of the class on the screen, so that when students walk in they know that they are in the right place.
2. Write: "welcome" on the screen and have directions that tell students what they need to do immediately. Example: "As you enter, please tell me your name. Then pick up a syllabus, a card, and a folder from the entrance table. Fold the card so that it will stand on your desk, and write your first name on it in BIG letters. Add your last name and major in smaller print. Write your name on the tab of the folder, (last name first, then first name). Read the syllabus until class starts." Note: By asking students to tell you their name as they enter, you can hear how the name is pronounced, and avoid the embarrassment of pronouncing it for the first time yourself.
3. When it's time for class to start - start class! Late arrivals can catch up by reading the screen.
4. For classes of 25 or less, I have students do brief, 10-second introductions. I tell them there will be a verbal quiz after all the introductions and that they can win stars if they know who is who. (Have fun with this, but remember that these are adults and college is not like junior high.)
5. For larger classes, I have students introduce themselves to three or four people around them, and then we might do "stand-ups" - stand up if you are a Spanish major, stand up if you are an education major, and so on. I explain that students need to know each other for our small group work, and in case they have a question.
6. I collect the file folders and put them alphabetically by student name into a big plastic carrying case. When students need to turn in assignments, they find the box on the entrance table and they put their papers in their respective folders. When papers are graded, they can pull their graded tests or assignments from their folders. The beauty of this system is that time is never wasted by passing out papers. For small classes, I put handouts in the folders of absent students.
7. After the introductions and the explanation of the folder and box system, I turn to the "Today we will" list that I've written on the board, posted on a large paper flip-chart, or projected on the screen. I like to actually write this list on the board, so I can return to it even while projecting my notes. A "today we will" list outlines my plan for the day. For example, for the first day, my "today we will list" says:
 - o See screen for instruction for card and folder.

- Introductions
- Turn in folders
- Go over syllabus completely
- Mini-lecture on _____
- Interest inventory
- Do you know what to read/do before the next class?

Note: The "today we will" list lets me walk around the room, teach from the projection system, and then look at the list for what I should do next. I tend not to forget things if I have the list. As the semester progresses, the "today we will" list might contain warm-up questions that then appear as test questions. The list helps students who arrive late or leave early see what they have missed.]

8. The mini-lesson/mini-lecture - whether it's a short overview of the first reading assignment, some sample problems, or 10 interesting questions students will be able to answer at the end of the course, I strongly recommend doing some course content on the first day. For classes that last longer than 50 minutes, I include a short student activity. I also think it's important to begin with course material on day one so that students begin to see who you are and how you teach. Since I teach courses in teacher education, I often talk about my teaching career. I include a few stories about how times have changed and about how some things in teaching never change.
9. Interest inventories are great for the first day of class. An interest inventory is just a short list of questions about students' backgrounds and interests. It may assess their prior learning as well. In addition to name and major, students can write about a hobby, interest, or goal. Do not be too personal. You can have them answer several questions about content - maybe solve a problem, write a short paragraph or answer specific questions. Finally open-ended questions are useful:
 - What are your goals after graduation?
 - What has a teacher done in the past that helped you to learn _____?
 - Is there anything else that you want me to know about you and your course of study?

You can always add one fun question:

- If your song played when you entered the room, what would that song be?
10. Every good class has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. I usually teach the mini-lesson, and then save the last six to eight minutes of class for the interest inventory and individual questions. This way, students don't have to wait on others to finish. I instruct students to turn in their interest inventory as they exit. As they are writing, I alphabetize their folders and put them in the box on the table. Another good closure is to ask if they know what to read/do before the next class, and if they know three people to ask about the assignment if they have a question.

Appendix B: The First Day of Class

FIRST DAY OF CLASS: WHAT CAN/SHOULD WE DO?

By L. Dee Fink.

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What can we do on the first day of class? What should we do?

One common answer is simply to start lecturing: "This is day one, here is lecture one, away we go." Another possibility is: "Here is the syllabus, go buy your books and we will see you at the next scheduled class period." Neither of these two options seems desirable. But what are some other possibilities?

Several years ago a group of professors at the University of Oklahoma visited each other on the first day of class and then discussed what they saw each other doing. But the discussion quickly went from what they observed, to "**What might be done?**" They eventually identified **nine attractive possibilities**, as described below. A teacher should not feel obliged to do all of these, but doing even one or several of them on the first day (or during the first week) would seem to accomplish a number of important tasks for getting a class started in the right way.

1. **Involve students quickly.**

This can be done in a variety of ways:

- having them introduce themselves
- allowing them to think and write silently
- having a whole-class or a small-group discussion, etc.

But letting students know right from the outset that they will be active participants seems like a good approach.

2. **Identify the value and importance of the subject.**

Not all students come to all classes with a clear idea of why this subject is important. The teacher may need to help them understand the significance of the course. The sooner this is done, the sooner the students will be ready to invest time and energy in the task of learning the subject matter.

3. **Set expectations.**

This can involve such things as what the teacher considers appropriate amounts of study time and homework for the class, the importance of turning homework in on time, expectations about in-class behavior, how the teacher wants to relate to students, and how much interaction among students is desired. The first day also offers an opportunity to find out what expectations the students have of the teacher and of the class.

4. **Establish rapport.**

Almost any class will be more enjoyable for both the teacher and the students if they know each other a bit. This exchange can be started with introductions, sharing some background information, etc.

5. **Reveal something about yourself.**

Sometimes students can relate to the teacher more productively if they can see him or her as a human being, i.e., as something more than just an authority figure or subject matter expert. Sharing personal stories and being able to laugh at yourself can help this process.

6. **Establish your own credibility.**

Sometimes this happens automatically, but at other times students need to know about the teacher's prior work experience, travel experience, or research and publications in an area. Having this knowledge can help students gain confidence that the "teacher knows what she or he is talking about."

7. **Establish the "climate" for the class.**

Different teachers prefer different classroom climates: intense, relaxed, formal, personal, humorous, serious, etc. Whatever climate you want, you should try to establish this early and set the tone for the rest of the semester.

8. **Provide administrative information.**

This often takes the form of going through the syllabus, presuming you have a syllabus with this information in it: what reading material the students will need; what kind of homework will be involved; what your office hours are; where your office is located; how the class grade will be determined; what your policies are regarding attendance, late papers, make-up exams, etc.

9. **Introduce the subject matter.**

Generally this introduction will be facilitated by starting with some kind of overview of the subject.

- What is it?
- What are the parts of the subject?
- How is it connected to other kinds of knowledge?

Final Note:

Remember that it is imperative that you do on the first day whatever it is you want the class to do the rest of the semester. If you want them to discuss, discuss on the first day. If you want them to work in small groups, find something for them to do in small groups on the first day.