

Tips for the First Day and Beyond

- Get to class early and chat with students as you set up.
- Research shows that students typically decide what kind of teacher you are and what kind of experience they will have being in your class in the first 15 minutes (Povlacs, 1985). Research also shows that instructors who make the most lasting impressions on students are those who possess and generate enthusiasm (McKeachie, 1998). Therefore, come prepared with information that the students need. Also let your enthusiasm influence your students.
- When you take attendance, ask a few questions of students as you go, or ask them to share why they are taking the course. Moreover, self-disclose when you discover appropriate opportunities. Students want to get to know you as a person. Let openness flow both ways.
- Stress your availability to students:
 - If you want students to come to your office, sincerely state this.
 - Give your office hours, email, and telephone numbers at which you are comfortable being reached by students. If there are time limits on when you will accept calls, state them.
 - If there are other occasions when you plan to make yourself available to students, let them know. One instructor made contact with students in the student center on a casual basis. The first day of class he stated, “ I go for coffee at 9:30 every day in the cafeteria. If you want to talk, come sit with me.” Not only is this instructor never without students at his table, but he now has more students than he can handle finding their way into his office. Students sincerely appreciate personal contact, look forward to it, and become more motivated by it (Lewis, 1987).
- Directly state your goals for the course and your expectations of the students. Describe what skills a student needs to possess to do well in your course. Give a student-centered overview of the entire course: “When you have completed this course, you will be able to ...”
- Establish procedures from day one:
 - Present the major topics to be covered on the board, overhead, handout, or computer projection and give an overview of the class which includes what (the material to be covered), why (its relevance to the course), where (the material’s importance and placement in the big picture), and how (the methods, exercises, and assignments that will be used).
 - Consistently introduce, cover, and wrap-up each new segment of material.
 - Always have a summary of the day’s events. You can do this yourself, or, better yet, why not ask a student or two to mention the main points that were covered today? This helps students internalize information by verbalizing it.
 - End each class with a hook for the next class period. Give students a good reason to come back.

- Learn students' names as quickly as possible. One or more of the following could assist you in this task:
 - Create an icebreaker appropriate for your class so each student will have the opportunity to speak to other students as you circulate. Encourage students to talk about their own experiences with course content. You can learn a great deal about them as you eavesdrop.
 - Take Polaroid snaps of six students at a time. Have the students write their own names under their picture. This is a great icebreaking technique for the class, too, because six people who may have never seen each other before are getting ready to pose for a family portrait together.
 - If you have students' hand in a schedule, have a place for them to add, "What I want you to know about me."
 - Use information sheets upon which you can collect data on prerequisite courses, hobbies, and interests-the possibilities are many. Have students write their names and concerns about the course on 3" x 5" note cards. Respond to the concerns during the next class period.
- Ask students what they want, need, and expect to learn in this class via discussion, paper and pencil, take-home assignment, or possibly by email or electronic discussion groups.
- Stay around to answer their questions after class. Talk to students personally.

Tips for Sustaining a Positive Learning Environment

- Be concerned about the physical setting, i.e. lighting, room temperature, etc.
- Make the examples you use relevant to your students' lives.
- Capitalize on real life situations, i.e. speakers on campus, national events.
- Address students by name using a seating chart, nametags, class pictures, or whatever works for you.
- Remember, not all reasons for incomplete assignments are excuses. Be compassionate, not cynical.
- Constantly read your audience's responses:
 - If it is clear from the expressions on the students' faces that they have no idea what you are talking about, take the time to present the concepts in different words, with different illustrations. Confusion does not necessarily disappear with more information over time.
 - If students are bored or you have just covered an in-depth topic intensively, stop, and allow them to talk or stretch for a minute or two and then continue.
 - In long classes, provide a short break to address human comforts.
- Provide nonverbal encouragement by maintaining eye contact, moving about the room and coming into the students' space, and being animated and expressive. Let them experience your enthusiasm.

- Model the thinking processes in your field for your students. Do not just tell them, show them, and let them practice. If you are not talking, it does not mean you are not teaching.
- Use positive reinforcement:
 - Give students recognition for contributing to in-class discussions or answering questions. Use positive reinforcement when possible, but if the answer is incorrect, try to lead the student through continued questioning to reach an acceptable position.
 - After getting permission from the student, share good student work with the rest of the class.
 - Validate student opinions by referring to points students made previously. Say, for example, "To follow up on John's point Tuesday...."
- Keep constant tabs on how your students are progressing by meeting outside of class to discuss problems and successes. Be willing to provide review, catch-up, or further explanation sessions.
- When asking questions, pause. Students need time to process the questions and their answers. Count to 15 before moving on. You may find it helpful to count to 15 before moving on (to allow enough time).
- Do not talk down to students. Avoid judging behaviors and stereotyping.
- Be a facilitator during discussions, not the emcee. You do not have to do all the talking in your classroom. Let the students help each other learn as you guide them.
- Give your students opportunities for providing feedback during the course. You might want to try one or two of the following.
 - At the end of the first week, ask students to take out a piece of paper and anonymously comment on "What helps me learn in this course," "What hinders my learning," "What changes could be made and how?"
 - Have a suggestion box outside of your classroom or office, or use an electronic suggestion box.
 - Establish a lecturer's feedback group. Any student can attend and offer feedback/suggestions about the course. Usually these groups meet in the instructor's office or the cafeteria.
 - Use a formative feedback instrument to get a reading early in the course (usually around week 4/5).
 - Invite a consultant from the university teaching center to discuss the course with the students during part of the class hour. This service is confidential.
 - Have a random sampling of students interviewed by a teaching consultant to address questions you have about your course and the students' learning.
- The classroom climate is enhanced by out-of-class contact. Recognize students in the halls and malls. Have dinner with your students in the residence hall.
- The climate in your office is just as important as the one you established in class.
 - Let students know where your office is and how to find it.

- Make conscious choices about how you arrange your office. When going over papers, have the student sit beside you so you can both see the product being discussed.
- If you are located in an inner complex, inform you students that the secretary doesn't bite.
- If you are working when a student appears, don't ignore the student. Take a moment to set a meeting time that is mutually agreeable.
- Personalize your office. Family photos, rugs, and plants help.
- If you make appointments with students, keep them. If you are detained, call someone to post a note for the student.

References

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Povlacs, J. (1985, March). *More than facts*. University of Minnesota, Duluth Instructional Development, 1-2, 4.

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