

The First Day of Class: Tips for Success

1. Get to class early and write your name, office number, phone number(s), and office hours on the board.
2. Introduce yourself and tell students a little bit about yourself:
 - What would you like students to know about you?
 - How would you like students to address you?
 - What do you find interesting about the course material?
 - What will make students pleased that they are taking this class with you?
3. Find out something about your students:
 - Distribute index cards for students to record personal information. Names, phone numbers, email addresses are useful, of course, but you may want to find out something about your students' prior experience with your discipline, other courses taken, career interests, hobbies, etc.
 - Consider some kind of activity to break the ice and learn student names. For example, in small classes have students interview one another in pairs and then tell the whole class about the person they interviewed. Or play the "name game." Have the first student introduce himself or herself and use a mnemonic device to make his or her name memorable. The next person then repeats the name of the previous person and introduces himself or herself with an appropriate mnemonic, etc.
4. Review the expectations of the course:
 - If you are a recitation leader, you may wish to review ground rules for discussion, how you will conduct a typical class session, your expectations of students, relationship of discussion section with larger lecture, etc. Also, ask students their expectations of the course and what they will do to help create an effective learning environment.
 - If you are a lab leader, you will want to review lab procedures and safety precautions.
 - If you have independent course responsibility, talk a bit about the most important aspects of the syllabus.
5. Give students a tantalizing taste of what the class will be like or administer a not-for-credit pre-test to find out what your students already know about the subject you will be teaching.
 - Design a short quiz that will give you a sense of "where your students are" in relation to the course material you'll be teaching.
 - Develop a short activity that will engage students immediately and actively in the course material.
6. Let students know what the topics and activities will be for the next class and assign homework.
7. Make that first class be an example of what process to expect in the course. If you plan to use groups, use groups. If you plan to have daily quizzes, have a pre-quiz. If you plan to have students ask questions, get them asking questions during the first class period. If you plan to hold class the full class period with interesting and meaningful learning, hold the class the full first period and make it interesting and meaningful.