

First Day of Class – Recommendations for Instructors

Set the Environment

The first day of class can have a large influence on students' perception of the entire course. By the end of the first class, you want students to have a good sense of why the course is interesting and worthwhile, what kind of classroom environment you want, how the course will be conducted, why the particular teaching methods are being used, and what the students need to do (generally) to learn material and succeed in the course. It is also important to give the students the sense that you respect them and would like all of them to succeed.

1. Establish Motivation

- a. Provide an entry-level preview of the course material and explain why the course material is important & interesting. Avoid jargon as much possible. Where applicable, make connections to:
 - Real world/everyday life
 - What students know
 - What students will need to be successful in future studies or career
 - What students are interested in, current events, ...

2. Personalize the learning experience

- a. Welcome students to your class – make it clear that you are looking forward to working with them.
- b. Introduce yourself, including describing your background and interests in connection to the subject, e.g.:
 - Why you find it interesting and exciting for them to learn
 - How it applies to other things you do (research, ...)
[Students—especially those majoring in the subject—say it is inspiring to hear about the instructor's background and research, and how it is relevant to the course.]
- c. Introduce teaching team
 - If applicable: TA's and anyone else involved that students will be interacting with (could show pictures or have them come to class)
- d. Make an effort to find out who the students are and their expectations, motivations, and interests, e.g.:
 - Ask them a series of questions about major, goals, background, ... (perhaps use clickers or a survey)
 - If appropriate, ask them to introduce themselves to other students they will be working with. [note: use with caution; some students say it makes them uncomfortable if used as a general "icebreaker", but it is appropriate to introduce themselves to group members with whom they will be working]

3. Establish Expectations (best if also handed out and/or online, not just spoken)

- a. Describe overarching (course-level) learning goals—big picture view
- b. Emphasize that you want them to learn and your role is to support their learning
- c. Explain how course will be conducted, what will happen in class, expectations for out of class work, overview of schedule, and marking scheme

- d. Explain why you're teaching the way you are teaching, how the different components support their learning (especially important if you are teaching differently than most other courses are taught);[†] e.g.:
- Teaching methods based on what is known about how people learn
 - Students need to play an active part and be intensively engaged in the learning process, ...
- e. Describe (generally) how to succeed in your course
- Learning and improvement take practice and effort; as well as good feedback.
A good activity is to tell students: "1. Think of something you are really good at. Write it down (you don't have to share it with anyone). 2. Now, in one or two words, describe how you got to be good at that thing. 3. On the count of 3, shout out how you got to be good." The overwhelming word shouted will be "PRACTICE". Then talk to them about what kind of practice is the most effective for mastering the material in this course.
 - Give general description of how assessments are used for both feedback and marks, leaving details to be read on course website
 - Give advice on how to study
- f. Express that you feel they can succeed if they put in the effort

4. Details (syllabus, detailed schedule, detailed learning goals, academic conduct, deadlines, rules ...)

- a. Don't go into details during first class; give links to more details on course
- Could give an assignment involving reading these.

5. Other Tips

Good practices	Avoid
Check out classroom before first class (avoid technical problems)	
Start class on time (sends message that you expect them to be on time)	
Telling students you think they can all succeed if they put in the effort (fine to say the course is challenging, as long as also express that it is interesting/worthwhile and do-able)	Telling students threatening things such as: you expect some to fail; or lots of students don't like the course and/or have found it very difficult
Address academic conduct in context throughout course (e.g. talk about plagiarism when you are giving a writing assignment)	Emphasizing rules and penalties first day (sends message of distrust, and they're not listening anyway)
Provide students with some experiences that give a sense of what future classes will be like	Talking the entire class time
End class on time with slide containing pertinent info (your name, office hours, contact info website, homework, ...)	Ending class early

In future classes: reinforce these messages periodically in the appropriate context.

[†] For examples, see *Framing the Interactive Engagement Classroom*: www.colorado.edu/sei/fac-resources/framing.html