



Starting Your Class on the Right Foot

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A FEW DAYS BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

Know your physical classroom

Visit the classroom where your class will meet. Get to know the technology, find the light switches, think about how you might rearrange the chairs (if that is a possibility).

Start meeting your students in advance

Review your Photo Roster in Canvas and check out any NameCoach (a tool in Canvas that enables you to listen to how students pronounce their own names) recordings. Even if you don't remember any names or faces, just seeing them will help you start to remember some of them.

Introduce yourself

Send a welcome message to your students in Canvas and consider creating a video introducing yourself to the class and posting it on the main page of your Canvas site. In it you can say a little about your background, why you like the subject matter of your course, and a few personal details that you feel comfortable sharing (e.g., your pet's name, your hobbies or leisure activities).

Start building your learning community

In your welcome message, encourage students to use NameCoach to record their names and to skim the Canvas site. You can even set up a discussion where students can post information about themselves that they'd like to share with others, as a way of starting to create a community in your class.

First impressions matter. Think about the image you want to project on day one

Reflect on the level of formality you prefer and prepare to dress the part. Also, consider how students will address you and what day-to-day interactions will look like. Wherever you land, the important thing for both you and your students will be consistency.

Make the first day count

Plan carefully how you will structure your first day of class. While some of it will involve introductory material, you should also plan some real work for day one, showing students that you mean to get right down to business. Class time is a precious and limited resource; you don't want to waste it!

ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Welcome students

Arrive early to welcome students, engage them in conversation, and answer their questions. Linger after class to address further questions.

Be clear on what students should call you

As you introduce yourself and perhaps share a little about your work or experience in your field to establish credibility and authority, tell students what to call you. Perhaps surprisingly, most students are most comfortable with a little formal distance; they will easily accept Professor Smith – even if your official university rank is not “professor.”

Consider using an ice-breaker

There are many fun icebreakers you can use to build your learning community. Be sure your icebreaker relates – at least in some way – to your course so that the icebreaker does not come across as silly or a waste of time.

Review key points in the syllabus

But do not read it! Instead, highlight important points that students will want to know about: what is this class about (i.e., what will we learn)? What will the workload be? How will I be graded? What important policies do I need to know right away?

Tell students what they can expect from you. Here are some examples --

- *You plan to arrive to class early and stay late to answer questions.*
- *You will strive to respond to emails within 24 hours (excluding weekends and holidays).*
- *You will be available to meet outside of class during office hours and by appointment. (Be sure to explain what office hours are and why students might want to use them.)*
- *You will strive to grade their assignments in a week.*

Tell students what you will expect from them; you may wish to establish expectations collaboratively with your students --

- *A device policy or perhaps how devices will be used in class*
- *Expectations for attendance and preparation for class*
- *Discussion etiquette*
- *Late assignment policies*

Begin building your learning community

- *Consider setting aside some time for everyone (including you) to introduce themselves, sharing information such as preferred name, hobbies and interests, reasons they chose your course, background in the subject, and any other relevant information.*
- *Consider an in-class or online survey to learn more about your students.*
- *Start learning your students' names by asking them to say their names as they speak.*
- *Get students talking to each other with an activity that enables small groups of students to learn about each other and discuss something related to course content. Choose an activity or discussion that sparks students' curiosity about course content. A problem or case they will later learn more about in the course can be particularly effective.*
- *Be sure to engage all your students, not just those who sit in the front rows, eagerly raise their hands, or talk a lot.*
- *Coach students on how to succeed in your course with tips and suggestions.*

Show enthusiasm for your course and content

- *Explain why your course is important, what is interesting or exciting about the material you will teach and why you like it.*
- *Relax. Smile. Be you.*

For more information and ideas for your first day, see J. Lang's article in the *Chronicle of Higher Ed.*:
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-to-teach-a-good-first-day-of-class/?sra=true>