

You Never Get a Second Chance to Make a First Impression; Making the Most Out of the First Day of Class

Set the Environment

The environment for your whole course will be established by how you present the first day of class. Your actions will set the tone for the rest of the term. 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, what the students need to do to learn material and succeed. Here are some suggestions:

1. Establish Motivation

- a. Provide a preview of the course material and explain why it is important & interesting; Try making connections to:
 - Real world/everyday life.
 - What students already know, or are interested in.
 - What students need in order to be successful in future studies or their career.

2. Personalize the learning experience

- a. Introduce yourself, describing your background and interests in connection to the subject
 - Why you find it interesting and exciting for them to learn.
 - How it applies to other things you do (research, ...).
- b. Introduce the teaching team
 - If applicable: introduce the TA's, co-instructors, STLF's, or anyone else involved in the course that student will be interacting with (if they can't come to class show pictures or videos of the rest of the teaching team).
- c. Make an effort to find out the students expectations, motivations, and interests, e.g.:
 - Ask them a series of questions about their major, goals, background, ... (use clickers or have them pass in a piece of paper)
 - Ask them to introduce themselves to their neighbors...

3. Establish Expectations (best if handed out or written down, not just spoken)

- a. Describe overarching (course-level) learning goals; the big picture view of the course.
- b. Emphasize that you want them to learn and that your role is to support their learning.
- c. Explain how the course will be conducted, what will happen in class, and expectations for out of class work. (Eg. full time work ~40-60hrs/wk ÷ 6 courses, including class time.)

- d. Explain why you're teaching the way you are teaching, how the different components of the course support their learning (you cannot "learn" for them); e.g.:
 - Teaching methods based on what is known about how people learn.
 - Students need to construct their own understanding.
- e. Describe how to succeed in your course.
 - Learning and improvement take practice and effort; as well as timely feedback.
 - 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. Be explicit, express that you know they can succeed if they put in effort.

4. Syllabus & Marking

- a. Don't go into the boring details; give them a handout or links to a more detailed description of the course (syllabus, detailed learning goals, schedule, marking scheme, ...). Maybe even give them a 1% quiz or an assignment involving reading the syllabus.

5. Other Tips

| Good practices | Not recommended |
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| Check out the classroom before first class (avoid technical problems) | Look up the room number on your way to the first lecture |
| Reward those who make an effort – start class on time | Just wait 10 minutes to see if anyone else shows up – this teaches people to come late next time |
| Tell students you think they can all succeed if they put in the effort (You can still tell them the course is challenging as long as you also express that it is interesting/worthwhile and do-able with appropriate effort) | Threatening things such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling students they will fail • Telling students that lots of students don't like the course and/or have found it extremely difficult |
| Try to give them an authentic experience as to what the classes will be like | Use practices that are inconsistent with the way you will be teaching the rest of the time |
| Don't belabor plagiarism and cheating on the first day - Address academic conduct in context throughout course (i.e. talk about plagiarism as you give out a writing assignment) | Emphasizing rules and penalties first day. This sends a message of distrust and they're probably not listening anyway |
| Involve students during class as soon as you can | Talk the entire class time without any interactivity |

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| End class on time (their time is valuable too) with a slide containing pertinent info (your name, office hours, contact info website, homework, ...) | Ending class early on the first day Or taking "just 5 more minutes" |
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