Strategies for the First Weeks
of Class

The First Day

• Check out the room before class so you know what activities will work.
• Plan student-centered activities.
• Think about professional appearance.
• Go to class early to chat with students and put them and you at ease.
• Bring chalk or marker.
• Be organized: Plan to do more than just pass out the syllabus.
• Write your name and the class on board.
• Put a plan for the class on the board.
• Be prepared for lost, late students.
• Do not apologize for being a teaching assistant.
• Share your professional background and enthusiasm for the subject.
• Highlight the importance of the course to your field and students’ futures.
• Get student information while taking attendance.
• Begin to learn your students’ names.
• Plan an ice breaker.
• Establish group rapport and study groups.
• Learn about your students’ expectations for the course.
• Distribute and introduce syllabus and course expectations.
• Give students a sample of good teaching.
• Give an assignment to be collected at the next meeting. In other words, hit the ground running on the first day of class with substantial content.

The First Weeks

• Arrive early to get to know individual students. Seek out different students each day and get to know something about them.
• Start class on time. Arrive early to set up technology in order to start on time.
• Start the lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, or cartoon on a slide or transparency to focus on the day’s topic.
• Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of class and list these on the chalkboard to be answered during the hour.
• Have the students write down what they think the important issues or key points of the day’s lecture will be or have been in a minute paper. Check for their understanding and completion.
• Use a variety of methods of presentation every class meeting.
• Break up class period about every twenty minutes by telling an anecdote, inviting students to put down pens, referring to a current event, or shifting media.
The First Weeks (continued)

• Form a student panel to present alternative views of the same concept.
• Give sample test questions and answers.
• Have students anticipate test questions and answer those questions as a study method.
• Hand out study questions or study guides.
• Be redundant. Students should hear, read, and see key material at least three times.
• Tell about your current research interests and how you got there from your own beginnings in the discipline.
• Conduct idea-generating or brainstorming sessions to expand horizons.
• Give students two passages of material containing alternative views to compare and contrast.
• Let your students see the enthusiasm you have for your subject and your love of learning.
• Provide wait time: Invite students to ask questions and wait for a response, or ask a question and wait for an answer.
• Roam around the classroom during class.
• Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period.
• Assign written paraphrases and summaries of difficult reading.
• Gather students feedback in the first three weeks of the quarter to improve teaching and learning.

After the First Month

Have students write instructional feedback to provide you with information about how students think and feel about the course. Ask the following four questions and have students submit their answers anonymously:

• What does your instructor do that helps your learning?
• What does your instructor do that hinders your learning?
• What are you doing to help your learning?
• What can your instructor do for the rest of the semester to help your learning? Provide one or two concrete, specific suggestions

Adapted from Angelo and Cross’s Classroom Assessment Techniques, 334. (1993).

Read through student responses and during the next course meeting discuss with the class what you are able to change and what you are unable to change and why. This is an opportunity to clarify course goals. You can choose to repeat this at mid-point or later.


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