

Building Community, Enhancing Learning, Fostering Innovation

It's your first teaching position and you've got butterflies in your stomach. Or maybe you've been teaching for years, and you've still got butterflies. They come because you care about what you're doing—not to mention the thrill of performing before a group. In fact, the first day of a course is exciting and anxiety-provoking for everyone. How do you take advantage of that excitement, inspire your students, and reduce anxiety? It's traditional to begin by discussing course requirements and perhaps even to cut the first class short, but is it a good idea? Does such a beginning tell your students why they should become excited about your course, or why you spend most of your waking hours studying this discipline? Does it tell them about how you teach or how you'll approach the subject matter? On the contrary, it tells them only the course outline and how to procure a grade. Here are some techniques to get your course off to a productive and stimulating start.

BEFORE MEETING WITH YOUR CLASS

Check out the room/setting.

- Location: Know where your room is and how to get there.
- Setup: Note the type of chairs, desks or tables and the board, lighting, etc.
- Limitations: Does the room have what you need?
- Possibilities:
 - Are there alternative configurations of chairs/tables (circles or semi-circles are generally best for fostering discussion).
 - How can you best use the setup or any special features of the room?

Define course particulars. Provide a syllabus/sub-syllabus/course policies sheet that includes

- Class time(s), day(s), location(s)
- Prerequisites
- Departmental and University requirements this course meets
- Course goals
- Your name
- Your e-mail address and/or phone number (include limitations on calling)
- Your office hours
- Your grading policies, including how the final grade will be determined
- Your participation and attendance expectations, including assignments not listed on the syllabus
- Your policy on tardiness or late assignments
- Learning needs and honor statements

De-fuse potential problems.

Know the add-drop policies and dates, especially whether *you* can add students in.
Know the maximum number of students you can have in class.

Plan “ice breakers”/introductions.

Who are your students and what do you want/need to know about them? How will you remember them? If you have access, see their names and photos on UVaCollab (<http://collab.itc.virginia.edu>) gather basic information (e.g., name, phone number, E-mail address, major, reason for taking the course, hometown, or another memory hook). See also the article “Not quite 101 ways to learn student names.”

What do your students want/need to know about you?

Think about what you will wear and what message it will send. Consider: How will you introduce yourself—what will your opening remarks consist of? What is your teaching persona?

Practice, practice, practice: Everything from writing on the board (Really! You might need to adjust the size or clarity of your handwriting.) to planning exactly how you are going to begin and end class. Script it out as much as necessary while remaining flexible

DURING THE FIRST CLASS

Arrive early.

- Arrange chairs as you want them.
- Write your name, class, course number, and section on the board.
- Talk to students as they come in.
- Hand out syllabus and any other materials as they come in, unless you have reason to withhold them.

Start well. Start on time and with authority. Be confident. Engage the students.

Make introductions.

- **Introduce yourself as a scholar and a person.**
 - Explain your interest in this subject or your expertise
 - Give students some insight into you by telling them something about yourself.
 - Go over the personal information on your handout/syllabus.
 - Consider recording your remarks for latecomers if you like.
- **Find out who the students are and introduce them to each other.**
 - Think also about ways to give people who realize they're in the wrong class or disinterested the opportunity to exit gracefully.

Do business.

- Go over basic information on syllabus.
- Find out whether anyone is not registered for class and find let them know what to do about it.

Teach something. Aim to pique interest in or curiosity about the course. What are the big issues? Controversial aspects? Fun facts?

Look ahead.

- Briefly explain what the class will be doing next time.
- Pose a question for students to ponder/answer.
- Give them an assignment and/or clear understanding of what they need to do by next class.

AFTER CLASS

Don't leave first. Meet and greet. Answer questions. Get some feedback.