

A hand is holding a large, blue, cut-out number '5' against a white background. The hand is positioned at the bottom left of the number, with the thumb and fingers visible. The number is a solid, bright blue color.

Things to Do on the First Day of Class

By Maryellen Weimer, Ph.D.





1 Showcase Course Content

The first day of class is the time for introductions, and the content should be among those things introduced.

Give a content show-and-tell that features a surprising fact, a question the content answers, some current issue that relates to the content, or something that illustrates, better yet, demonstrates why the content in this course matters.

Establishing relevance and promoting intrigue can help motivate student learning right from the start.



2 Get Students Talking

Expectations for an interactive course should be set from day one and telling students that you want them talking isn't nearly as effective as getting them talking.

They should be talking to you and talking with each other. Maybe it's a getting-to-know you ice-breaker, or some initial exploration of a content issue of interest to students, or a student discussion of what's on the syllabus.

The goal is hearing multiple voices on the first day.



3 Be Personable

Yes, you are the professor, but you are also a person. Students know that you're the one in charge and that you're the one who enforces the rules. Teachers shouldn't come across as the big "heavy" who lightens up only if students understand and accept who has the authority.

It's much more effective to begin the course letting students know that this is a course you want to teach (fingers crossed that it is) with content you love, and that you are there to help them learn.

Students want to be taught by a professor but one who acts like a person.



4 Give Students a Reason to Read the Syllabus

In most courses teachers cover syllabus content so completely students don't have to read it. Talking at length about the syllabus also sends the message that students can ask you rather than look up course information.

How about this, distribute the syllabus and give students five minutes to review it. Then put them into groups and give the groups five minutes to answer 10 questions about the syllabus. The first group to answer all the questions correctly wins stickers that say "We're #1," high fives from the teacher, applause from the class, or whatever suits your style and conveys the message that the things students need to know about this course are in the syllabus and they should look there before asking you.

The goal is teaching in ways that make students responsible learners.



5 Be Authentic

Yes, this relates to being personable but it's not the same.

Since the students probably don't know you, maybe you can fool them on the first day, but they will find out and they will feel cheated. It's about being true to your personal style right from the start. That doesn't mean "doing what you've always done" on the first day. It's good to change things up, make improvements, and step outside our comfort zones a bit.

I have a good friend who is forever after me to try current fashion trends. "Try this wrap, it'll look good on you." I try it, it feels strange, but maybe it does look good. Then I wear it for cocktails on the neighbor's dock and get compliments from all sides. And I'm making a fashion statement I never thought I could make. Teaching can be about discovering who you are and sharing those discoveries with students.

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Additional Articles to Help You on the First Day of the Semester

[The First Day of Class: A Once-a-Semester Opportunity](#)

There's only one first day of class. Here are some ideas for taking advantage of opportunities that are not available in the same way on any other day of the course.

[First Day of Class Activity: The Interest Inventory](#)

The interest inventory is a simple tool to help you acquaint yourself with your students. Unlike many icebreakers, the interest inventory is a paper-based activity and students do not have to give answers aloud in front of class. The interest inventory, therefore, helps you get to know your students privately and allows you to ask different questions than you would during oral introductions.

[Advice for the First Day of Class: Today We Will](#)

The first day of class is critical. What happens on the first day, even in the first moments, sets the tone for the entire course. The impression you make will last the entire semester, and today's students are not shy about sharing their opinions. Most students will make up their minds about the course and the instructor during that first class period.

[First Day of Class Activities that Create a Climate for Learning](#)

There's no discounting the importance of the first day of class. What happens that day sets the tone for the rest of the course. Here are a few novel activities for using that first day of class to emphasize the importance of learning and the responsibility students share for shaping the classroom environment.

[10 Things to Make the First Day \(and the Rest\) of the Semester Successful](#)

From day one the students learn the routine: they arrive, pick up handouts on the entrance table, and read the screen for instructions. They know what to do, and it saves time. Here's how I recommend introducing the routine on day one.

[First Assignment Helps Establish Expectations](#)

There is a lot to cover on the first day of class. You establish procedures and convey expectations. You review the syllabus and, if you're teaching a lab, safety protocol. You also spend some time teaching some material. While you might not make an assignment for the first day, you still should use some time on the first day to talk about your expectations for students' work and how you assign grades.