



A GUIDE TO THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS



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The first day of class is your chance to introduce yourself and your course objectives. Remember that first impressions are crucial since students create opinions about you rapidly. Since the success of your first day may have an influence on the rest of the course, it is critical to have a **clear plan**. Many students may be "shopping" for the class and schedule at the start of the semester.



Here are some ideas for the first day of class;

Be early Arrive 5 minutes early. Let students know that you are ready to talk with them: smile, make eye contact, chat, whatever suits your style.

Introduce yourself Your introduction should be succinct, but make sure to cover certain key areas. Here is some information you may consider sharing:

- **Personal biography:** your place of birth, educational history, hobbies, how long you have been at the university, and etc.
- **Educational biography:** how you specialized in your field of study, a description of your area of expertise, your current (research) projects as they relate to the course, and your future plans.
- **Teaching biography:** how long you have been teaching, how many subjects/classes you have taught so far, what other courses you teach, what you enjoy about teaching, and etc.
- **Teaching philosophy:** How you teach, and how you expect students to learn.

Consider how much you want people to know and how much you want to reveal about yourself when deciding what information to share.



Allow the students to introduce themselves and get to know each other

You can consider how introductions may pave the way for a more productive and welcoming classroom environment. Rather than asking general questions about their name and major, you can ask them **questions about the subject** and the atmosphere you want to create over the semester.



- **You can provide an “Introduce Yourself” discussion in the LMS forum.**

Consider asking students to provide their preferred names, majors, and interest in the course topic, as well as what they want to learn from the course or any relevant experiences. The aim is to provide them with a place to discuss their personal experiences and interests while also connecting them with other students who share similar interests.

- **You can ask your students to write a one-page reflection about themselves.**

You can clarify that you will not share their reflections with anyone else or in the class, and this is an opportunity for students to tell you about themselves. They may answer one or more of these questions:

- Are there any significant events that have influenced your life?
- What are your future plans and goals?
- Is there anything I should be aware of that could influence your performance in the course, and what can I do to help motivate you?
- Do you have any needs (physical, cognitive, emotional, or otherwise) that you would like me to know about in order to better accommodate you in the classroom?

“What happens between you and your students in your classroom or lecture hall depends largely on what you want to happen. How you treat each other and how you and your students feel about being in that place with each other is modeled and influenced by you.”



Clarify learning objectives and your expectations

Lay out expectations to orient students.

- Inform students about the prerequisites (if any)
- Emphasize main aspects of the syllabus.
- Consider requiring students to take a quiz on the syllabus
- Point out your expectations for student behavior (i.e. punctuality, participation, seeking help, giving and receiving feedback etc.)
- Share some advice that will help students learn and be successful in your course

NOTE: Spend very little time reviewing the syllabus. Use the first valuable moments of class time to make a memorable impression on the students. You will need to address syllabus again in upcoming classes as students often switch courses in the first few weeks.

Collect data about students Hand out a questionnaire or pre-test to learn about your students, their background knowledge and level of motivation. (See Appendix for a sample questionnaire)

Don't run out of time Organize your time so that you will have a real ending to the class, especially on the first day.

Checklist

- Be early
- Introduce yourself
- Allow the students to introduce themselves and get to know each other
- Clarify learning objectives and your expectations (i.e. Course overview, Course expectations, Instructor responsibilities, Student responsibilities, Assessment, etc.)
- Collect data about students
- Don't run out of time



Appendix

Sample First-Day Questionnaire

Dear Students,

Please take a few moments to fill in the survey below to help me learn more about you. Thank you for your time.

Questions

1. Your name and surname.
2. What is your faculty / department?
3. What (i.e. math, engineering, education, etc.) courses have you taken up to now?
4. What (i.e. math, engineering, education, etc.) courses are you taking this semester (besides this one)?
5. Why are you taking this course (required vs. elective)? What do you hope to learn in this course?
6. Do you have any past experience relevant to the content of this course? (i.e. course work, jobs, volunteering, etc.)
7. What are some of your extracurricular interests?
8. Do you have any special needs or disabilities that you would like me to know about?
9. Any further comments?

Further Reading and Resources

- Making the most of the first day of class:
<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/firstday.html>
- Teaching the first day of class:
<https://teaching.washington.edu/topics/preparing-to-teach/teaching-the-first-day-of-class/>
- The first day:
<https://www.honolulu.hawaii.edu/facdev/the-first-day/>
- Learning students' names:
<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/teaching/names>



References

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