

### Key to Successful Interactions: Start Building Rapport

Establishing positive rapport with your students is critical to a successful first day as well as student learning in the course as a whole. How do you establish rapport? First, use names. Even in large classes, find a way to call on students by name. Using student names is a critical but sometimes under-utilized method of establishing respect and building rapport.

Build on the use of names: say hello and check in briefly with your students before class starts. Saying hello to someone by name is a surprisingly effective strategy for learning success. In a class of 50 or less, memorize names and faces in the first weeks; it is well worth the investment. Arrive early so that you can quickly set up and then greet students. Say hi, ask them how they are doing, and how classes are going.

On the first day, ask students about themselves. Bring index cards for them to fill out or have them complete online surveys. Zoom polls can be used if teaching online. Ask them questions related to their lives as students—their major, or year in college, where they are from, other interests they spend time on, and what they are obligated to spend time on (jobs, sports teams, band or theater), and find out their obligations to student organizations. Get a feel for their time commitments and save this information for future reference. Ask them about their motivation for taking the course as well and about their learning habits. In turn, you can add a short "one shot" video from you, introducing your course and yourself as a professor.

During the first day and throughout the semester, aim for some point of contact with each student—or in a large class, be at the entrance or walk the room—to be near each student and to frequently engage each student. If teaching online in an asynchronous class, correspond with as many students as possible.

Research has shown that for large classes, just the feeling that the professor is approachable can improve students' learning, so do not worry about being "too" available. It is likely that your

approachability lessens their stress because they know that their teacher is friendly and can help in a crisis. If a crisis does occur, the university has a lot of resources for you to draw from to help a student.

### Creating Positive Expectations for Student Involvement

Make at least part of the first class interactive and engaging. Make it intriguing. For example, pose a puzzle to solve that involves course content, show a short video (2-3 minutes) for discussion, or do a demo of some sort, stopping to ask students to make predictions.

Help students meet each other. They start to identify possible study partners when you create a group activity or provide a few minutes for "pair-share" thinking aloud. If you are online, introduce students to online methods of engagement like break-out rooms.

"If this is their first class with you, they are waiting to see you, observe your posture, hear your voice, translate your tone, and get a general feeling about you; but these initial impressions are not just about you. These impressions are more about the perspective you have about them as students, as people: their capabilities, their ability to trust you, and their desire to work alongside you. As class leader, you must decide how to use this day."

*From: Anderson, D. M., McGuire, F. a., & Cory, L. (2011). The first day: it happens only once. Teaching in Higher Education, 16(3), 293–303.*

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2010.546526>

Above all, be yourself and be your liveliest self! Students will draw their energy from you. Be intentional on the first day, for a positive start.



## Some specific ideas to get started

From a Stanford e-publication called “Tomorrow’s Professor: 101 Things You Can Do the First Three Weeks of Class,” <https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/168>

- “Start the lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, or cartoon on slide or transparency to focus on the day’s topic.
- Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these ...to be answered during the hour.
- Have students write down what they think the important issues or key points of the day’s lecture will be.
- Ask the person who is reading the student newspaper what is in the news today.
- Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning.
- Ask students to write about what important things are currently going on in their lives.
- Find out about students’ jobs; if they are working, how many hours a week, and what kind of jobs they hold.”

From the Faculty First blog, “First Day of Class Activities” <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/first-day-of-class-activities-that-create-a-climate-for-learning/>

**First Day Graffiti** – “This is an adaptation of an activity proposed by Barbara Goza in the *Journal of Management Education* in 1993. Flip charts [or large “post it” paper] ... are placed around the classroom. Each chart has a different sentence stem. Here are a few examples:

“I learn best in classes where the teacher \_\_\_\_”  
“Students in courses help me learn when they \_\_\_\_”  
“I am most likely to participate in classes when \_\_\_\_”

“Here’s something that makes it hard to learn in a course: \_\_\_\_”

“Here’s something that makes it easy to learn in a course: \_\_\_\_”

Give students markers to record answers on these charts—or on multiple white boards—and you can build a discussion from their comments.

**Syllabus Speed Dating** – From Karen Eifler, an education professor at the University of Portland. This activity works best if chairs can be placed in two rows, facing:

“Students sit across from each other, each with a copy of the syllabus that they’ve briefly reviewed. Eifler asks two questions: one about something in the syllabus and one of a more personal nature. The pair has a short period of time to answer both questions. Eifler checks to make sure the syllabus question has been answered correctly. Then students in one of the rows move down one seat and Eifler asks the new pair two different questions. Not only does this activity get students acquainted with each other, it’s a great way to get them reading the syllabus and finding out for themselves what they need to know about the course.”

Tip: use a projected online timer to pace the ‘speed dating’; if you like something with flair, try this exploding version: <http://www.online-stopwatch.com/bomb-countdown/>

For more first day ideas, see these two blogs:

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/five-things-to-do-on-the-first-day-of-class/>

and

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/five-things-to-do-on-the-first-day-of-class/>