

1st Day DOs and DON'Ts

Steering Towards the Smooth Road

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How to Begin?

- ① How to Begin?
- ② How To Engage Students
- ③ Establishing Ground Rules and Expectations
- ④ Checklist

1st day anxiety

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You begin the process of building rapport on the first day of class, and continue cultivating the environment throughout the semester.

So, how can one achieve that special first impression? What can you do to establish a positive beginning?

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- What do you believe about teaching and learning
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Sometimes students never have the sense that their instructors are “real people,” and they may respond in ways that would be unthinkable to someone they felt they knew.

Put your name and contact on the board!

It is always surprising to find that many students don't know the names of their teachers.

DO...

- ... share all information relevant to the course
- ... share information about yourself, establishing rapport
- ... stay within your limits of comfort

DON'T...

- ... get too detailed on personal experiences
- ... focus on your own inadequacies or limitations
- ... overshare

DON'T...



How To Engage Students

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Show enthusiasm!

According to Scholl-Buckwald ³, instructors “Rarely ... need to impress students with our command of the material. What is not always clear to students is whether we are interested in the subject and whether we will be able to help them become as competent as we are.” Share your enthusiasm! What intrigues you, and what could interest them?

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You should also try to address doubts that your students probably have but will not voice, such as:

- “What’s in it for me?”
- “How can I use this information/knowledge?”
- “Will I be able to learn the skills in this course?”
- “Will I be able to make the grade I want in this course?”
- “How much work will I have to do to get what I want from this course?”

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Some ideas

- Lead a (short) discussion to stimulate interest in the subject
- Mention typical problems in the field, commonly held myths, stimulating insights
- Talk about related research currently being pursued at RWTH
- Present an interesting problem and sketch its solution & applications
- Illustrate how the course material will be useful for different majors
- Address how the learning will help them in their future careers

DO...

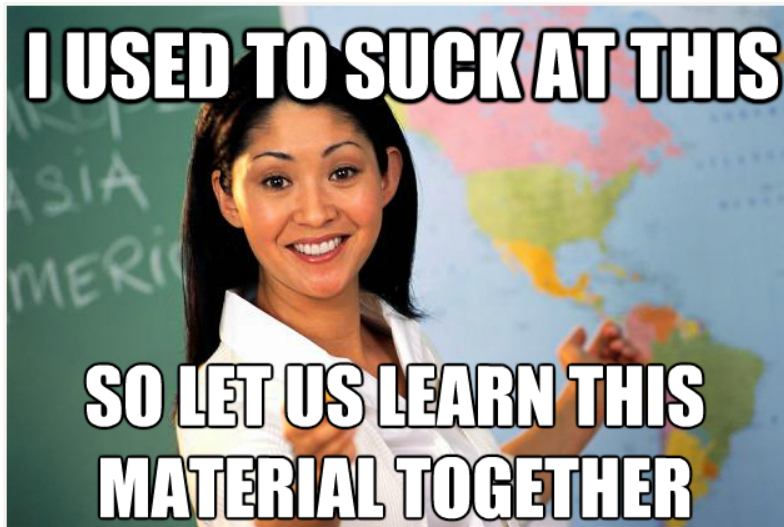
- ... show enthusiasm
- ... use verbal & nonverbal cues
- ... address unmasked doubts
- ... establish the value of the course
- ... create a pleasant atmosphere
- ... show that they can succeed
- ... check for questions

It is important to establish a sense that you are willing to change things they do not understand. Be accepting of all questions. This does not mean you need to change your plans, but you can listen to questions and be responsive.

DON'T...

- ... be critical of textbooks, available material, infrastructure
- ... focus on “how hard” the course is, or in general “failure” issues
- ... give the impression of impatience or boredom
- ... dismiss questions as unimportant or rush through answers
- ... be critical of yourself

DON'T...



Establishing Ground Rules and Expectations

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You are the boss

Come to class prepared to present your policies and expectations. Make clear what you want from students and what you will not accept.

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Anticipate common concerns, such as:

- How you will communicate outside of class
- Office hours
- Course material
- Important dates

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You should be careful planning the limits of your student / instructor relationships. This is your comfort zone, and it is important that you are clear about what you **want**, what you think it's **nice to have**, and what you **don't want**.

Stating your limits

Remember: although you “make the rules” (within reason), you must also follow them. Make sure the students understand everything, and be the example. Do not fail to enforce your policies, as students will judge that unfair.

- Questions: show of hands?
- Punctuality
- Cell phones
- Emails

Attention: this does not mean that you have to be unreasonable. Unexpected situations do happen, and it is fine to make exceptions - as long as you clearly state **WHY** you are making this exception, and what are the conditions for accepting it.

DO...

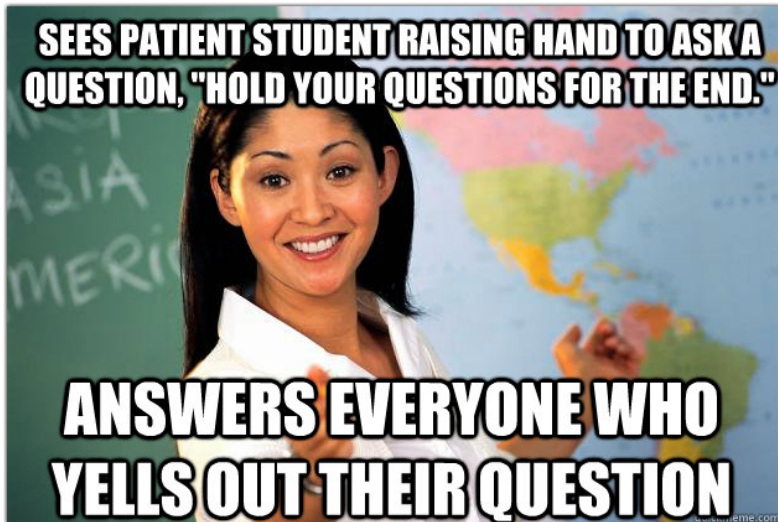
- ... prepare in advance
- ... be clear about what your policies are
- ... make sure everybody understands them
- ... be prepared to discuss finer points
- ... listen to the students' reactions and concerns
- ... stick to your rules and enforce them

Tip: Give students two minutes to write their anonymous reaction to the first day. This can provide feedback on doubts, or questions that students were afraid to raise. It also builds good rapport, as it sends the message that you are genuinely willing to listen.

DON'T...

- ... leave all decisions to the class
- ... be overly democratic
- ... give mixed signals
- ... fail to abide by your own rules
- ... fail to enforce your policies

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Checklist

- Am I energized to be enthusiastic about this class?
- Is the classroom arranged properly?
- Is my name, course title, and contact on the chalkboard?
- Do I have a way to gather information on student backgrounds, interests, expectations for the course, questions, concerns?
- Are your policies defined and clear?
- Do I have announcements of needed information ready?
- Do I have a way of gathering student feedback?
- When the class is over:
 - Will students want to come back?
 - Will you want to come back?

References

- 1 McKeachie, W. J. "Teaching Tips: A Guide book for the Beginning College Teacher", 8th Ed., Lexington, Mass: Heath,1986.
- 2 Kniefelkamp,L. In Rubin, S. "Professors, Students, and the Syllabus", The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 7,1985, p.85.
- 3 Scholl-Buckwald, S. "The First Meeting of the Class" in Teaching As Though Students Mattered, 1985.