The First Day of Class
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The first day of class should familiarize your students with you, each other, and the aims of the course. It should also lay the foundation for the structure of subsequent classes. While future meetings won't likely require a syllabus run-through or introductions, the first class provides an opportunity to demonstrate the kind of work students will be expected to do throughout the semester and the kind of engagement they should expect from their classmates and from you.

Ideally, you'll have some interaction with your students before the first day of class. **It's a good idea to connect with your students prior to the first meeting, whether that's in a brief video greeting recorded on Zoom or in an over-email icebreaker.** A fair amount of work for the first day of class should occur before the meeting itself. Acquaint yourself with your roster, even though it's subject to change, in order to get a sense of your students' stages in college. If you're teaching in a classroom and have the ability to access it, visit the room and familiarize yourself with the technology available and any difficulties you might foresee with the room. This is a useful time to think about the kind of classroom dynamics you'd like to foster and how your teaching persona can aid in developing those dynamics.

What are the goals you'd like to accomplish on the first day of class? An initial meeting should include introductions, a discussion of the syllabus, establishment of classroom etiquette and expectations, and an introductory exercise. Icebreakers are a matter of personal preference; regardless of whether or not you've asked you students to engage more specifically, it's helpful to know their preferred names. A confidential survey using a platform such as Google Forms can help students answer questions about themselves that may be more difficult to state in class.

Sample questions might be:
- What are your preferred pronouns?
- What do you hope to learn in this class?
- Is there anything that I should know about that might aid your learning?
- What are you looking forward to about online learning? What are you most nervous about?

Zoom also provides the option to include your own pronouns along with your name as it appears on screen; explain to students the process by which they can add their own pronouns to the participant list.

Rather than simply read the syllabus aloud for your students, look for opportunities to take questions and clarify any directions or policies that are essential to the class. The first day is the time to define more nebulous concepts like class participation, technology guidelines, and general classroom etiquette. When establishing video etiquette for online courses, it's additionally important to think about the realities or limitations of students' home lives. Requesting that students keep their cameras on during synchronous classes can help foster a sense of community, while allowing your students to stay off-screen saves bandwidth and maintains your students' privacy. **The criteria for how you'll be evaluating students, whether in-person or online, should be clearly articulated.**

Engage students in the material of the class beyond the parameters of the syllabus by directing them to course content. A short writing assignment introduces your students to the topic and to the habit of frequent, consistent writing; it also allows you evaluate each students' writing at an early, less formal stage. These short responses will ideally function as points of discussion from

which students can start the work of engaging with each other and their own writing. What kind of presence do you want writing to have in class meetings, and how can you use this first day as an opportunity to model future work?

Bibliography

James M. Lang, "How to Teach a Good First Day of Class." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, online.
James M. Lang's informal advice guide for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is a convivial introduction that provides a brief reading list of more theoretical research on the topic.

Richard E. Lyons, Meggin McIntosh, Marcella L. Kysilka. *Teaching College in An Age of Accountability*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003.
Teaching College in An Age of Accountability divides the first day of class into two objectives: clarification for students and understanding for the instructor. Lyons, et al. also provide potential exercises for initial class meetings. Carnegie Mellon University's Eberley Center for Teaching Excellence borrows largely from this book for their abbreviated post "Design & Teach a Course."

Teach Remotely, "Best Practices: Online Pedagogy." Harvard University.
Harvard's "Best Practices" page for online teaching largely focuses on the work that instructors should do *before* the first class meeting, including ways to assess student accessibility.

Jessie Borgman and Casey McArdle. Chapter 1. *Personal, Accessible, Responsive, Strategic: Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*. Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 2019.
While geared towards online writing instructors (OWI), Borgman and McArdle's emphasis on the importance of community-building and personal instruction apply to in-person teaching as well.

Linda Nilson, L. Chapter 4. *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors* (2nd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, 2003.
This chapter segments an instructor's first day of class into a series of discrete actions, from vocal warm-ups before class to conducting an anonymous survey of expectations at the end of class.