



The First Day of Class

The first day of class is an important one. That first impression makes a big difference for the rest of the semester. It is a day to make a connection with your students, to learn who they are, their strengths and their weaknesses. It is a day to explain why you teach the way you do, and what they should know to do well in your course. The results to be gained from a successful first day are worth every hour you put into planning it. Above all, establish the climate you want to maintain for the rest of the semester, and get students working on that first day.

1. Before The First Day

- a. If you are a new instructor, get an Endicott ID card at the Gull Card Office in College Hall. You can contact them at gullcard@endicott.edu
- b. Make sure your books are in. If they haven't come into the bookstore, make a plan for how your students will get their books.
- c. Build your Gullnet site. If you have questions about how to do this, contact Academic Technology at kbarclay@endicott.edu
- d. Visit the classroom you've been assigned. Check all of the gear that you'll be using and make sure it works. Is all the software you'll be using already installed on the computers? If there's a problem with any of the classroom technology, contact Media Services at 978-232-1062. Sit in the worst seats in the room. Will anything stop students from seeing the board or from hearing you?
- e. Print out the class roster from Gullnet or from COAST and start learning the names of the students before the first class.
- f. Plan out your responses to various challenges you may encounter. Below are some of the most common:
 - One or more students haven't prepared for class
 - A student is quiet and not contributing
 - A student is overly aggressive or demands constant attention
 - A student asks an excellent question, one that you can't answer immediately
 - A student is rude to yourself or to another student

2. Introduce Yourself & The Course

- a. If you are teaching for the first time and aren't sure how to dress, imagine you are working in an office and dress professionally. You can relax later in the semester if you want, but you should establish your authority at the start. It is much tougher to get that authority back later if you don't.
- b. Be professional. Make sure the students understand you enjoy being in the classroom with them, and treat them with respect at all times. *Love your job -- it will show!*

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- c. Be accessible. Get to class 10 minutes early and start chatting with the students. Stay a couple minutes late for the same reason.
- d. Make sure the room is still set up the way you want it to be.
- e. When the class is supposed to begin, introduce yourself. Explain or demonstrate your expertise by discussing how long you've been teaching, the research you have done, or whatever is appropriate for your discipline. Scholl-Buckwald (1985) found that students want to know if the class is going to meet their needs, if the instructor is competent, if the instructor is fair, and if the instructor will care about them.
- f. After introducing yourself, hand out the syllabus. It will take them a while to look through it, so give them that time. You might consider giving them a short quiz over the syllabus on the second day of class, to be sure everyone understands it. You might also leave some of the aspects of the syllabus open to discussion, and facilitate student discussion about what the course should look like this semester. Some instructors allow student leadership on a collegiality contract for class behavior, which increases student buy-in.
- g. Explain what you consider to be the key aspects of the course, especially what they should know or be able to do by the end of the class (the learning objectives). Explain what they need to do to be successful in the class. Explain your expectations clearly, and stick to them through the semester.
- h. Say, "I'm sure you have some questions about the course and what we'll be doing this semester. Let's take a few minutes to answer those." Give them up to a minute to think of a question. After a few questions, move on to learning about the students.

3. Learn Who Your Students Are

- a. Learn the students' names as quickly as possible. Know them all by the third week of class, without fail.
- b. Using an icebreaker is always a good idea to build connections between you and the students, and to strengthen the bonds already there between the students themselves. Remember though, they will already have done a lot of icebreakers during Endicott's student orientation and if they are returning students, they may already know a lot of the other students. For a list of icebreakers, see the tip sheet on icebreakers on the CTE's website.

4. Investigate Your Students' Understanding of the Subject

- a. Test your students' preknowledge about the course materials with an ungraded quiz or test. At a small school like Endicott, two sections of the class can be very different and you may find yourself having to customize the classes a great deal. Testing their preknowledge also allows you to give them the same pretest at the end of the semester and see how much change your class has made in your students.

5. Begin To Organize Groups

- a. Short-term groups can be organized either by the students or through various randomizing methods (counting off, by handing out playing cards and having them match either number

or suit, by birthdays, etc.). Long-term groups should be organized by the instructor. The results of a preknowledge survey can be used for this. Ensure that each group has some of the most knowledgeable students and some of the least knowledgeable. It is often helpful to also scatter the various majors through the groups as well. Finally, check to see that everyone has support in the groups. If there are one or two minority students in the room, assign them to the same group rather than isolating them in random groups.

6. Ending Well

- a. Be sure the class has an assignment for the next class, and knows how to do it.
- b. Solicit feedback in the form of a "minute paper." What do students still want to know?
- c. Assure them they will do well in class. Be positive!

7. Learn From Every Class

- a. Starting with the very first class, take a few minutes after class in your office to reflect on what went well and what changes you need to make for the next class. If you have done this previous semesters, compare your current notes from the ones from the previous class. Do any patterns emerge? Are some sessions always difficult? Should you redesign them for next year?

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