What can we do on the first day of class? What should we do?

One common answer is simply to start lecturing: "This is day one, here is lecture one, away we go." Another possibility is: "Here is the syllabus, go buy your books and we will see you at the next scheduled class period." Neither of these two options seems desirable. But what are some other possibilities?

Several years ago a group of professors at the University of Oklahoma visited each other on the first day of class and then discussed what they saw each other doing. But the discussion quickly went from what they observed, to "What might be done?" They eventually identified nine attractive possibilities, as described below. A teacher should not feel obliged to do all of these, but doing even one or several of them on the first day (or during the first week) would seem to accomplish a number of important tasks for getting a class started in the right way.

1. Involve students quickly.

This can be done in a variety of ways:
   - having them introduce themselves
   - allowing them to think and write silently
   - having a whole-class or a small-group discussion, etc.

But letting students know right from the outset that they will be active participants seems like a good approach.

2. Identify the value and importance of the subject.

Not all students come to all classes with a clear idea of why this subject is important. The teacher may need to help them understand the significance of the course. The sooner this is done, the sooner the students will be ready to invest time and energy in the task of learning the subject matter.

3. Set expectations.

This can involve such things as what the teacher considers appropriate amounts of study time and homework for the class, the importance of turning homework in on time, expectations about in-class behavior, how the teacher wants to relate to students, and how much interaction among students is desired. The first day also offers an opportunity to find out what expectations the students have of the teacher and of the class.

4. Establish rapport.

Almost any class will be more enjoyable for both the teacher and the students if they know each other a bit. This exchange can be started with introductions, sharing some background information,
etc.

5. **Reveal something about yourself.**

Sometimes students can relate to the teacher more productively if they can see him or her as a human being, i.e., as something more than just an authority figure or subject matter expert. Sharing personal stories and being able to laugh at yourself can help this process.

6. **Establish your own credibility.**

Sometimes this happens automatically, but at other times students need to know about the teacher's prior work experience, travel experience, or research and publications in an area. Having this knowledge can help students gain confidence that the "teacher knows what she or he is talking about."

7. **Establish the "climate" for the class.**

Different teachers prefer different classroom climates: intense, relaxed, formal, personal, humorous, serious, etc. Whatever climate you want, you should try to establish this early and set the tone for the rest of the semester.

8. **Provide administrative information.**

This often takes the form of going through the syllabus, presuming you have a syllabus with this information in it: what reading material the students will need; what kind of homework will be involved; what you office hours are; where your office is located; how the class grade will be determined; what your policies are regarding attendance, late papers, make-up exams, etc.

9. **Introduce the subject matter.**

Generally this introduction will be facilitated by starting with some kind of overview of the subject:

- What is it?
- What are the parts of the subject?
- How is it connected to other kinds of knowledge?

**Final Note:**

Remember that it is imperative that you do on the first day whatever it is you want the class to do the rest of the semester. If you want them to discuss, discuss on the first day. If you want them to work in small groups, find something for them to do in small groups on the first day.
101 THINGS YOU CAN DO
THE FIRST THREE WEEKS OF CLASS

By Joyce T. Povlacs
Teaching and Learning Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Introduction

Beginnings are important. Whether the class is a large introductory course for freshmen or an advanced course in the major field, it makes good sense to start the semester off well. Students will decide very early - some say the first day of class - whether they will like the course, its contents, the teacher, and their fellow students.

The following list of "101 Things You Can Do..." is offered in the spirit of starting off right. It is a catalog of suggestions for college teachers who are looking for a fresh way of creating the best possible environment for learning. Not just the first day, but the first three weeks of a course are especially important, studies say, in retaining capable students. Even if the syllabus is printed and lecture notes are ready to go in August, most college teachers can usually make adjustments in teaching methods as the course unfolds and the characteristics of their students become known.

These suggestions have been gathered from UNL professors and from college teachers elsewhere. The rationale for these methods is based on the following needs: 1) to help students make the transition from high school and summer or holiday activities to learning in college; 2) to direct students' attention to the immediate situation for learning - the hour in the classroom; 3) to spark intellectual curiosity - to challenge students; 4) to support beginners and neophytes in the process of learning in the discipline; 5) to encourage the students' active involvement in learning; and 6) to build a sense of community in the classroom.

Ideas For the First Three Weeks

Here, then, are some ideas for college teachers for use in their courses as they begin a new semester.

Helping Students Make Transitions

1. Hit the ground running on the first day of class with substantial content.

2. Take attendance: roll call, clipboard, sign in, seating chart.

3. Introduce teaching assistants by slide, short presentation, or self-introduction.

4. Hand out an informative, artistic, and user-friendly syllabus.

5. Give an assignment on the first day to be collected at the next meeting.

6. Start laboratory experiments and other exercises the first time lab meets.
7. Call attention (written and oral) to what makes good lab practice: completing work to be done, procedures, equipment, clean up, maintenance, safety, conservation of supplies, full use of lab time.

8. Administer a learning style inventory to help students find out about themselves.

9. Direct students to the Learning Skills Center for help on basic skills.

10. Tell students how much time they will need to study for this course.

11. Hand out supplemental study aids: library use, study tips, supplemental readings and exercises.

12. Explain how to study for kind of tests you give.

13. Put in writing a limited number of ground rules regarding absence, late work, testing procedures, grading, and general decorum, and maintain these.

14. Announce office hours frequently and hold them without fail.

15. Show students how to handle learning in large classes and impersonal situations.


17. Give sample test question answers.

18. Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty; be clear when collaboration is wanted and when it is forbidden.

19. Seek out a different student each day and get to know something about him or her.

20. Ask students to write about what important things are currently going on in their lives.

21. Find out about students' jobs; if they are working, how many hours a week, and what kinds of jobs they hold.

**Directing Students' Attention**

22. Greet students at the door when they enter the classroom.

23. Start the class on time.

24. Make a grand stage entrance to hush a large class and gain attention.

25. Give a pre-test on the day's topic.

26. Start the lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, or cartoon on slide or transparency to focus on the day's topic.

27. Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these on the chalkboard.
to be answered during the hour.

28. Have students write down what they think the important issues or key points of the day's lecture will be.

29. Ask the person who is reading the student newspaper what is in the news today.

**Challenging Students**

30. Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning.

31. Use variety in methods of presentation every class meeting.

32. Stage a figurative "coffee break" about twenty minutes into the hour; tell an anecdote, invite students to put down pens and pencils, refer to a current event, shift media.

33. Incorporate community resources: plays, concerts, the State Fair, government agencies, businesses, the outdoors.

34. Show a film in a novel way: stop it for discussion, show a few frames only, anticipate ending, hand out a viewing or critique sheet, play and replay parts.

35. Share your philosophy of teaching with your students.

36. Form a student panel to present alternative views of the same concept.

37. Stage a change-your-mind debate with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during the discussion.

38. Conduct a "living" demographic survey by having students move to different parts of the classroom: size of high school, rural vs. urban, consumer preferences...

39. Tell about your current research interests and how you got there from your own beginnings in the discipline.

40. Conduct a role-play to make a point or to lay out issues.

41. Let your students assume the role of a professional in the discipline: philosopher, literary critic, biologist, agronomist, political scientist, engineer.

42. Conduct idea-generating or brainstorming sessions to expand horizons.

43. Give students two passages of material containing alternative views to compare and contrast.

44. Distribute a list of the unsolved problems, dilemmas, or great questions in your discipline and invite students to claim one as their own to investigate.

45. Ask students what books they've read recently.
46. Ask what is going on in the state legislature on this subject which may affect their future.

47. Let your students see the enthusiasm you have for your subject and your love of learning.

48. Take students with you to hear guest speakers or special programs on campus.

49. Plan "scholar-gypsy" lesson or unit which shows students the excitement of discovery in your discipline.

**Providing Support**

50. Collect students' current telephone numbers and addresses and let them know that you may need to reach them.

51. Check out absentees. Call or write a personal note.

52. Diagnose the students' prerequisites learning by questionnaire or pre-test and give them the feedback as soon as possible.

53. Hand out study questions or study guides.

54. Be redundant. Students should hear, read, or see key material at least three times.

55. Allow students to demonstrate progress in learning: summary quiz over the day's work, a written reaction to the day's material.

56. Use non-graded feedback to let students know how they are doing: post answers to ungraded quizzes and problem sets, exercises in class, oral feedback.

57. Reward behavior you want: praise, stars, honor roll, personal note.

58. Use a light touch: smile, tell a good joke, break test anxiety with a sympathetic comment.

59. Organize. Give visible structure by posting the day's "menu" on chalkboard or overhead.

60. Use multiple media: overhead, slides, film, videotape, audio tape, models, sample material.

61. Use multiple examples, in multiple media, to illustrate key points and important concepts.

62. Make appointments with all students (individually or in small groups).

63. Hand out wallet-sized telephone cards with all important telephone numbers listed: office department, resource centers, teaching assistant, lab.

64. Print all important course dates on a card that can be handed out and taped to a mirror.

65. Eavesdrop on students before or after class and join their conversation about course topics.

66. Maintain an open lab gradebook, with grades kept current, during lab time so that students can

check their progress.

67. Check to see if any students are having problems with any academic or campus matters and direct those who are to appropriate offices or resources.

68. Tell students what they need to do to receive an "A" in your course.

69. Stop the work to find out what your students are thinking, feeling and doing in their everyday lives.

Encouraging Active Learning

70. Have students write something.

71. Have students keep three-week-three-times-a-week journals in which they comment, ask questions, and answer questions about course topics.

72. Invite students to critique each other's essays or short answers on tests for readability or content.

73. Invite students to ask questions and wait for the response.

74. Probe student responses to questions and wait for the response.

75. Put students into pairs or "learning cells" to quiz each other over material for the day.

76. Give students an opportunity to voice opinions about the subject matter.

77. Have students apply subject matter to solve real problems.

78. Give students red, yellow, and green cards (mate of posterboard) and periodically call for a vote on an issue by asking for a simultaneous show of cards.

79. Roam the aisles of a large classroom and carry on running conversations with students as they work on course problems (a portable microphone helps).

80. Ask a question directed to one student and wait for an answer.

81. Place a suggestion box in the rear of the room and encourage students to make written comments every time the class meets.

82. Do oral show of hands multiple choice tests for summary review and instant feedback.

83. Use task groups to accomplish specific objectives.

84. Grade quizzes and exercises in class as a learning tool.

85. Give students plenty of opportunity for practice before a major test.

86. Give a test early in the semester and return it graded in the next class meeting.
87. Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period.

88. Make collaborate assignments for several students to work on together.

89. Assign written paraphrases and summaries of difficult reading.

90. Give students a take-home problem relating to the days lecture.

91. Encourage students to bring current news items to class which relate to the subject matter and post these on a bulletin board nearby.

**Building Community**

92. Learn names. Everyone makes an effort to learn at least a few names.

93. Set up a buddy system so students can contact each other about assignments and coursework.

94. Find out about your students via questions on an index card.

95. Take pictures of students (snapshots in small groups, mug shots) and post in classroom, office, or lab.

96. Arrange helping trios of students to assist each other in learning and growing.

97. Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.

98. Assign a team project early in the semester and provide time to assemble the team.

99. Help students form study groups to operate outside the classroom.

100. Solicit suggestions from students for outside resources and guest speakers on course topics.

**Feedback on Teaching**

101. Gather student feedback in the first three weeks of the semester to improve teaching and learning.
What Makes Great Teachers Great?

By Ken Bain

APRIL 9, 2004

When Ralph Lynn retired as a professor of history at Baylor University in 1974, dozens of his former students paid him tribute. One student, Ann Richards, who became the governor of Texas in 1991, wrote that Lynn's classes were like "magical tours into the great minds and movements of history." Another student, Hal Wingo, an editor of People magazine, concluded that Lynn offered the best argument he knew for human cloning. "Nothing would give me more hope for the future," the editor explained, "than to think that Ralph Lynn, in all his wisdom and wit, will be around educating new generations from here to eternity."

What did Lynn do to have such a sustained and substantial influence on the intellectual and moral development of his students? What do any of the best professors do to encourage students to achieve remarkable learning results?

I and several colleagues from the Searle Center for Teaching Excellence at Northwestern University studied more than 80 professors from various disciplines to try to determine what outstanding teachers do inside and outside their classrooms that might explain their accomplishments. And when we examined in particular how good teachers conduct class, we found that they follow several common principles. Specifically, they:

Create a natural critical learning environment. "Natural" because what matters most is for students to tackle questions and tasks that they naturally find of interest, make decisions, defend their choices, sometimes come up short, receive feedback on their efforts, and try again. "Critical" because by thinking critically, students learn to reason from evidence and to examine the quality of their reasoning, to make improvements while thinking, and to ask probing and insightful questions. This is, by far, the most important principle—the one on which all others are based and which commands the greatest explanation.

Some teachers create a natural critical learning environment within lectures; others, with discussions; and still others, with case studies, role-playing, fieldwork, or a variety of other techniques. The method of choice depends on many factors, including the course's objectives, the personalities and cultures of the teachers and students, and the learning habits of both. But an intriguing question or problem is the first of five essential elements that make up a good learning environment.

Often the most successful questions are highly provocative: What would you do if you came home from college and found your father dead and your mother married to your uncle, and the ghost of your...
father appeared saying that he had been murdered?
Why did some societies get in boats and go bother
other people, while others stayed at home and tended
to their own affairs? Why are some people poor and
other people rich? What is the chemistry of life? Can
people improve their basic intelligence?

The second important element is guidance in help-
ing students understand the significance of the ques-
tion. Several years ago, we asked Robert Solomon, a
philosophy and business professor from the University
of Texas, to talk about his teaching to a group of
faculty members. Solomon called his talk “Who Killed
Socrates?” and in that title captured much of the in-
tellectual energy of his inquiry into Socratic pedagogy
and why it isn’t used much anymore. When we
watched Solomon conduct an introductory philosophy
class on epistemology, he simply stood before the
freshmen and sophomores, looked them in the eye,
and asked, “Does anyone here know anything for
sure?” The way he asked the question gave it mean-
ing. As students cast about for a positive answer, reel-
ing in one solution and then another, they began to
gasp the purpose of this modern inquiry. Once that
happened, their learning could begin.

Many teachers never raise questions; they simply
give students answers. If they do tackle intellectual
problems, they often focus only on their subject and
the issues that animate the most sophisticated scholar-
ship in the field. In contrast, the best teachers tend
to embed the discipline’s issues in broader concerns,
often taking an interdisciplinary approach.

When Dudley Herschbach teaches chemistry at
Harvard University, he does so with a combination of
science, history, and poetry, telling stories about
human quests to understand the mysteries of nature.
The lesson on polymers becomes the story of how the
development of nylon influenced the outcome of
World War II. He even asks his chemistry students to
write poetry while they struggle to comprehend the
concepts and ideas that scientists have developed.

Good teachers remind students how the current
question relates to some larger issue that already in-
terests them. When Solomon taught an advanced un-
dergraduate course in existentialism, he began with a
story about life under Nazi rule in occupied France in
the early 1940s, reminding students that even ordinary
activities like whispering to a friend could have had
dire consequences in that police state.

Third, the natural critical learning environment en-
gages students in some higher-order intellectual ac-
tivity: encouraging them to compare, apply, evaluate,
analyze, and synthesize, but never only to listen and re-
member. “I want the students to feel like they have
invented calculus and that only some accident of birth
kept them from beating Newton to the punch,” Don-
ald Saari, a mathematics professor at the University
of California at Irvine, told us. Unlike so many in his
discipline, he does not simply perform calculus in
front of the students; rather, he raises the questions
that will help them reason through the process, to see
the nature of the questions, and to think about how to
answer them.

A fourth aspect of a good learning environment is
that it helps students themselves answer the question.
The professors we studied often raised important in-
quiries but challenged students to develop their own
explanations and defend them. And finally, a good
learning environment leaves students wondering:
“What’s the next question?” and “What can we ask
now?”

In the 1990s, the Institute for the Learning Sciences
at Northwestern began working with several profes-
sors to develop highly interactive multimedia pro-
grams that tried to create this natural critical environ-
ment. For example, Larry Silver, a professor of art
history at the University of Pennsylvania, has develop-
eda software called “Is It a Rembrandt?,” which engaged
each student in becoming a museum’s top art investi-
gator and determining the authenticity of three of
Rembrandt’s paintings. To do so, the students must ex-
amine the paintings and build a case to support their
conclusions. They can inspect each piece of art, com-
pare it to similar works, view the curator’s files, or go
to the conservation lab. At each turn, they encounter
questions, but they decide which ones to pursue, pick-
ing their own path through the material. When, for ex-
ample, the students have been drawn into a close ex-
amination of the brushwork on the face of the paint-
ing Old Man With a Garter, they can ask whether
Rembrandt’s students also mixed brushwork styles in
their paintings. If they do, Professor Silver appears
on the screen to tell them about “bravura display,”
and the students can then ask, “What is bravura brush
stroke?”

Slowly, the students build their understanding of the
art world in which Rembrandt worked and of the crit-
ics, collectors, scholars, and controversies that have
emerged over the years around the work of the Dutch
master, his students, and his imitators. They build a vo-
ocabulary for thinking about various issues, an under-
standing of technical details and procedures, and an
ability to use a vast array of historical facts. In short,
they learn to think like a good art historian, to appre-
ciate the questions that the discipline pursues, to
frame important questions of their own, and to deter-
determine the kinds of evidence that might help resolve
controversies.

Gerald Mead, a professor emeritus of French at
Northwestern, developed a similar program for his
course on the history of modern France called “Invita-
tion to a Revolution,” which invites students to travel
to the late 18th century to see if they can avoid the ex-
cesses of the French Revolution. In Deborah Brown’s
physics course students can use a program that chal-
enges them to build an elevator. In Jean Goodin’s
course on free speech, students can act as Supreme
Court justices to decide a tricky actual case that asks
whether people can be held legally responsible for the
long-range consequences of their speech.
Start with the students rather than the discipline.

Every year more than 700 students crowd into Sandel’s classroom at Harvard to take his course on justice, in which he asks them to imagine the following scenario: You are the driver of a runaway trolley car that is approaching five men who are working on the track. You cannot stop the train, and it seems destined to run over the men and kill them. As you speed down the track toward this waiting tragedy, you notice a side track where you can steer the trolley car if you choose to do so. The only problem is that one man is working on that track and the train will undoubtedly kill him if it goes that way. What would you choose to do, he asks the students? Do you turn the car onto the side track, killing one person but saving five others? What would be most just and why?

Often the students have no difficulty deciding that they would take out the one life to save the five others.

Sandel then introduces a wrinkle to the story. Suppose, he says, that you are not on the train but standing on an overpass watching it speed toward the five workers. As you watch this disaster in the making, you notice a large man standing next to you, also peering over the railing of the overpass. You quickly calculate that if you push this person over the railing, he will land on the track in front of the train. He will die, but his body will stop the train, saving five lives. Would it be just to give that person a shove?

In that exercise Sandel hopes to provoke students to think about fundamental issues of justice and understand their own thinking in relationship to that of some of the major philosophers. Throughout the course, he then embeds all the major philosophical schools and writers he wishes to consider in contemporary ideological battles intended to excite the students. His knowledge of the history of ideas helps him select the proper passage from Mills or Kant; his knowledge of and concern for the students help him select the political, social, and moral debates that will engage them. Equally important, he constantly changes the issues to fit new generations of students.

Most customary instruction follows an organization that stems wholly from the discipline, a set of topics and subjects that need to be covered. But many of the best teachers make a deliberate and carefully measured effort to confront some paradigm or mental model that students are likely to bring with them to class.

This idea of beginning where the students are rather than where disciplinary traditions might dictate has another influence on practices in the classroom. It leads to explanations that start with the simple and move toward the more complex. “If students have an understanding that is down here,” Jeanette Norden explained, putting her hand close to the floor, “you don’t start with something up here. Some medical students come in not even knowing what a neuron is—a neuron is a cell in the brain—so you have to begin with that simple notion and then you can build from there quickly.”

Seek commitments. “I tell my students the first day of class that the decision to take the class is the decision to attend the class every time it meets,” one professor explained. “I also tell them that my decision to teach the class includes the commitment to offer sessions worth attending, and I ask them to let me know if they think I’m not doing that.”
Highly effective teachers approach each class as if they expect students to listen, think, and respond. That expectation appears in scores of little habits: the eye contact they make, the enthusiasm in their voice, the willingness to call on students. It contrasts sharply with professors who seldom if ever look at their students, who continue on in some set piece almost as if they do not expect students to listen, and who never try to generate a discussion or ask for a response because they don’t expect anyone to have any.

Help students learn outside of class. The best professors do in class what they think will best help their students to learn outside of class, between one meeting and the next. That approach is different from deciding to do something simply because it “covers” some subject, but it might lead to a variety of orthodox approaches: a demonstration that both confronts existing notions and provokes confrontation with new ones; a debate that enables students to practice critical thinking and to realize gaps in their own understanding and reasoning abilities; group work that asks students to grapple together and helps build a sense of community.

Because the best teachers plan their courses backward, deciding what students should be able to do by the end of the semester, they map a series of intellectual developments through the course, with the goal of encouraging students to learn on their own, engaging them in deep thinking. In ordinary classes, instructors might create assignments for students, but they rarely use the class to help students do the work.

Engage students in disciplinary thinking. The most effective teachers use class time to help students think about information and ideas the way scholars in the discipline do. They think about their own thinking and make students explicitly aware of that process, constantly prodding them to do the same.

Through such an approach teachers help students build an understanding of concepts rather than simply perform their discipline in front of them. While others argue that students must learn (memorize) information first and use reasoning only later, the professors we studied assume that learning facts can occur only when students are simultaneously engaged in reasoning about those facts.

In class, they might engage students in a highly interactive “lecture” in which they present a problem and coax students into identifying the kinds of evidence they would need to consider to solve that problem and how that evidence might be gathered: “Here’s the evidence we’ve encountered thus far; what do you make of it? What problems do you see? What questions would you ask about this evidence? What evidence do we need to answer those questions, and how will we find or collect that evidence?”

Create diverse learning experiences. “The brain loves diversity,” Jeanette Norden told us repeatedly. To feed that appetite, she and other outstanding teachers conducted class in a multitude of ways. Sometimes they offered visual information (pictures, diagrams, flowcharts, timelines, films, or demonstrations); other times, auditory input (speech or visual symbols of auditory information—written words and mathematical notations). Some material was organized inductively, from facts, data, and experimentation to the general principles; other things, deductively, by applying principles to specific situations. The teachers gave students an opportunity to learn sequentially, piece by piece; they also gave them space to learn globally, through sudden insights. Some of the learning involved repetition and familiar methods; some, innovation and surprises. The very best teachers offered a balance of the systematic and the messy.

In sum, no one achieves great teaching with only vigorous vocal tones, a powerful microphone, good posture, strong eye contact, and honorable intentions. Great teachers are not just great speakers or discussion leaders; they are, more fundamentally, special kinds of scholars and thinkers, leading intellectual lives that focus on learning, both theirs and their students’. They focus on the nature and process of learning, rather than the performance of the instructor.

Ken Bain is an adjunct professor of history at New York University and director of the university’s Center for Teaching Excellence. He was formerly director of the Searle Center for Teaching Excellence at Northwestern University. This article is adapted from his book, What the Best College Teachers Do, to be published this month by Harvard University Press. Copyright © 2004 by the president and fellows of Harvard College.
Ten Things to Make the First Day (and the Rest) of the Semester Successful

By Mary C. Clement, Berry College, GA mclement@berry.edu

I like to arrive in the classroom well before the students. It gives me time to get things organized. I create an entrance table (I use chairs or desks if there’s no table) that holds handouts for students to pick up. From day one the students learn the routine: they arrive, pick up handouts on the entrance table, and read the screen for instructions. They know what to do, and it saves time. Here’s how I recommend introducing the routine on day one.

1. Post your name and the name and section of the class on the screen, so that when students walk in they know that they are in the right place.

2. Write “welcome” on the screen and have directions that tell students what they need to do immediately. Example: “As you enter, please tell me your name. Then pick up a syllabus, a card, and a folder from the entrance table. Fold the card so that it will stand on your desk, and write your first name on it in BIG letters. Add your last name and major in smaller print. Write your name on the tab of the folder, (last name first, then first name). Read the syllabus until class starts.” [Note: By asking students to tell you their name as they enter, you can hear how the name is pronounced, and avoid the embarrassment of pronouncing it for the first time yourself.]

3. When it’s time for class to start—start class! Late arrivals can catch up by reading the screen.

4. For classes of 25 or less, I have students do brief, 10-second introductions. I tell them there will be a verbal quiz after all the introductions and that they can win stars if they know who is who. (Have fun with this, but remember that these are adults and college is not like junior high.)

5. For larger classes, I have students introduce themselves to three or four people around them, and then we might do “stand-ups”—stand up if you are a Spanish major, stand up if you are an education major, and so on. I explain that students need to know each other for our small group work, and in case they have a question.

6. I collect the file folders and put them alphabetically by student name into a big plastic carrying case. When students need to turn in assignments, they find the box on the entrance table and they put their papers in their respective folders. When papers are graded, they can pull their graded tests or assignments from their folders. The beauty of this system is that time is never wasted by passing out papers. For small classes, I put handouts in the folders of absent students.

7. After the introductions and the explanation of the folder and box system, I turn to the “Today we will” list that I’ve written on the board, posted on a large paper flip-chart, or projected on the screen. I like to actually write this list on the board, so I can return to it even while projecting my notes. A “today we will” list outlines my plan for the day. For example, for the first day, my “today we will list” says:

   • See screen for instruction for card and folder.
   • Introductions
   • Turn in folders
   • Go over syllabus completely
   • Minilecture on ______
   • Interest inventory
   • Do you know what to read/do before the next class?

   [Note: The “today we will” list lets me walk around the room, teach from the projection system, and then look at the list for what I should do next. I tend not to forget things if I have the list. As the semester progresses, the “today we will” list might contain warm-up questions that then appear as test questions. The list helps students who arrive late or leave early see what they have missed.]
8. The minilesson/minilecture—whether it's a short overview of the first reading assignment, some sample problems, or 10 interesting questions students will be able to answer at the end of the course, I strongly recommend doing some course content on the first day. For classes that last longer than 50 minutes, I include a short student activity. I also think it's important to begin with course material on day one so that students begin to see who you are and how you teach. Since I teach courses in teacher education, I often talk about my teaching career. I include a few stories about how times have changed and about how some things in teaching never change.

9. Interest inventories are great for the first day of class. An interest inventory is just a short list of questions about students' backgrounds and interests. It may assess their prior learning as well. In addition to name and major, students can write about a hobby, interest, or goal. Do not be too personal. You can have them answer several questions about content—maybe solve a problem, write a short paragraph or answer specific questions. Finally open-ended questions are useful:
   • What are your goals after graduation?
   • What has a teacher done in the past that helped you to learn ________?
   • Is there anything else that you want me to know about you and your course of study?
   You can always add one fun question:
   • If your song played when you entered the room, what would that song be?

10. Every good class has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. I usually teach the minilesson, and then save the last six to eight minutes of class for the interest inventory and individual questions. This way, students don't have to wait on others to finish. I instruct students to turn in their interest inventory as they exit. As they are writing, I alphabetize their folders and put them in the box on the table. Another good closure is to ask if they know what to read/do before the next class, and if they know three people to ask about the assignment if they have a question.