**Making the Most of the First Week of Your Course**

The first week of the course can be the most important week of the semester because it is an opportunity to set the stage for all that follows. Here are some suggestions for the first week:

1. Do an engaging and enjoyable activity so that students leave the first class with enthusiasm for the course.

First impressions are important in many areas of life, including the impression you make on the first day of the course. Be sure to include an enjoyable activity that engages students and gives them an opportunity to participate in discussion. There are many engaging activities for the first day or week of class in my Instructor Manual, Section 1: <http://www.collegesuccess1.com/MotivationM.htm>

1. **Pace your class to maintain student interest.**

As a general rule, plan to spend no more than 10-15 minutes on any activity. Plan some activities that require student interaction.

1. **Establish a supportive environment for learning.**

Provide positive feedback to students who volunteer, especially during the first class. Encourage students to be supportive of one another. I usually make this statement early in the course:

I believe that students learn better in a positive and supportive environment. It is my goal to be supportive of your learning and encourage you to be supportive and respectful of other students.

1. **Introduce yourself.**

Spend about five minutes or less introducing yourself so that students get to know you. Here are some ideas to include in your introduction:

* Your educational journey
* Your most important values
* Why you enjoy teaching this course
* What you hope students learn in the course
* Your professional experience
* Your favorite inspirational quote

Don’t spend too much time on your personal introduction since there are other important goals for the first class.

1. **Get to know your students and help your students get to know one another.**

Students begin any new course with some excitement or anxiety about a being in a new situation. You can build on the excitement and reduce anxiety by doing some ice breakers. You can find a variety of ice breakers and introductory activities on this page of my website: <http://www.collegesuccess1.com/MotivationM.htm>

Don’t spend the entire first class on ice breakers since there are other important goals for the first class. Ideally, aim to spend no more than 10-15 minutes on the ice breakers. You can do the ice breakers quickly by dividing your students into groups of 5 and having the group share some answers to the ice breaker questions. Call on each group to share some of the responses. Remember to share some of your own answers to the questions.

1. **Use your syllabus to help students understand the course objectives and requirements.**

You can find components and sample syllabi at: <http://www.collegesuccess1.com/Syllabus.htm>

As an alternative to reading your syllabus, give students 5 minutes to skim your syllabus. Tell them that there will be some discussion questions at the end of 5 minutes. Ask for volunteers to answer some questions such as:

* What is a syllabus and why should you keep it?
* How can you make an A in this course?
* Do you have to attend every class?
* What behavior is required in this course?
* What happens if your assignment is late?
* How do you contact the instructor?
* What textbook is required?
* What is one student learning outcome that you find interesting?

If students cannot answer your questions, pause so that they can look up the answers. You could also give a 5 minute quiz on your syllabus at the beginning of the second class meeting.

1. **Set the standards for appropriate behavior in your classroom.**

Standards for student behavior should be outlined in your syllabus and implemented on the first day. It is important to enforce the standards from the beginning. For example, if you want only one person speaking at a time, enforce this behavior at your first opportunity. If you would like some ideas on dealing with difficult students, see Faculty Resources on this page of my website:

<http://www.collegesuccess1.com/FacultyResources.htm>

1. **Provide an overview of online components of the course such as your course management system or electronic textbook.**

While you may not be able to provide this overview during the first class, it is important to include this information during the first week or no later than the second week. Show students how to log into Blackboard or other course management systems. Help them to access their online textbook or other online materials.

Adjust these suggestions to match your teaching style and the needs of your students. I hope you find these ideas useful in making a good impression and generating enthusiasm for your course. Best wishes as you help your students to be successful.