

HOW DO I PLAN FOR THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS?

The first day of class sets the tone for the rest of the semester. As an instructor, you'll want to take steps to set clear expectations as well as establish rapport and an inclusive learning environment from day one.

► How can I prepare before the first day of class?



Think about your goals as a teacher. Your role as the instructor is not only to help students understand the course content but also to motivate and engage them.

Connect with your teaching team to communicate the goals of the course, clarify the purpose of section, and specify your responsibilities, including lecturing, writing, and grading assignments.

Visit your classroom to get a sense of the space and how you can most effectively use it.

Plan your first class, including the activities you'll do, the way you'll communicate course expectations, and the content of any handouts you want to distribute. Decide when and where you will hold office hours as well as how students should contact you outside of class.

► How should I introduce myself?

It is important for students to get to know you as both a teacher and a person. Tell them your name and what they should call you, what your area of research is, and what you find genuinely interesting about this course.

Don't be afraid to mention your interests and activities outside of the classroom as well. Conveying what motivates you and your interest in the course material will help them get interested, too!

This is also a good time to provide a "hook"—this can be as simple as putting up a comic that relates to your field, identifying the questions that matter to scholars in your discipline, or connecting the material of the course to everyday life.

► How can I build rapport and connection in the classroom?

Building rapport early can help create a positive and inclusive learning environment, which is one of the most crucial elements of your success as a teacher.

Choose icebreakers that connect with course content and help both you and the students get to know each other. For example, ask students to introduce themselves to a partner and then introduce their partner to the larger group.

Ask students why they're taking your course and what they hope to get out of it. You may also want to learn about their extracurricular interests, so you can tailor your approach and choose examples that resonate with them.

You can collect all of this information on index cards on the first day, or you can invite students to sign-up for a brief one-on-one or small group meeting with you at the start of the semester.



► How can I communicate expectations?



Draw up a course syllabus to convey your expectations for each class meeting and of the course as a whole.

Let students know how and when they can contact you and any other information you would like to make explicit in the syllabus, such as:

- What are your expectations for participation?
- Is there an absence policy, for section or lecture?
- Are students required to meet with you at any point in the semester? If so, how often?
- What is your collaboration policy?

There are also many implicit contracts at work. What are the unspoken rules of your class or your discipline? Who sets the agenda? Who speaks? How is success measured? Making these “hidden” features of a course explicit will contribute to your students’ success and help you feel more confident.

► How do I manage the material?

You’ll need to get into the course content to help students learn more about what the class is all about, and you’ll likely have a lot to cover, depending on how often your class meets. Try to prioritize main themes, and don’t worry about covering everything that first week. It is important to find a balance between setting the tone and getting into the material.

Give your students an opportunity to interact with each other. Ask them to move around and work with different partners or small groups during the session. This allows the class to continue building rapport while encouraging collaboration and active learning.

Additional Resources

- Our handbook, [Hit the Ground Running](#), is a great place to start for all of the fundamentals about teaching, including additional ideas and resources for planning your first day of class.
- On the Bok website, read about [inclusive teaching strategies](#) and creating an engaging, authentic, and respectful learning environment.
- Find [strategies for effective lesson planning](#) and [sample lesson plans](#) from the University of Michigan.
- [More icebreakers](#) to use on the first day of class and throughout the semester from Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis.
- Why the first five minutes of every class matter: [Small Changes in Teaching](#) by James M. Lang.

