



The Importance of the First Day in Class

The first class of the semester offers instructors the opportunity to lay the groundwork for the rest of the semester and it is important in that what do can impact the rest of the semester. Therefore, it is important to have a plan. The first day of class offers the opportunity to:

- Begin to build community by helping your students get to know you and each other
- Jump into content of the course
- Set the tempo for the semester
- Articulate your expectations and goals are for the course
- Emphasize to your student that focus of the course should be on learning not grades

To make your first class successful, the following are a few tips that might help you achieve the goals listed above:

- Learn your student’s names by using ice breakers, class photos or name tags
- Begin by asking your students to anonymously tell you in writing what they expect from the class
- Discuss your learning goals by telling them what they should be able to do at the completion of the semester
- Present your course content by employing real-world scenarios that will help your students understand the context for the course.
- Let the students experience what will be expected of them throughout the semester. If you plan on class discussions, then discuss. If you plan to use active learning, then employ an activity. However you plan to engage students, use your teaching tools on the first day of class
- What to discuss the syllabus at the end of the first class
- Don’t spend too much time reviewing the syllabus on the first day because opt in an out of classes during the first few weeks of the semester. Go into more depth once your class has gelled

It is our hope that your first week will go well and that this semester runs smoothly and we all remain healthy!

Source:
Svinicki, M., & McKeachie, W. J. (2011). Meeting a class for the first time. In *McKeachie’s teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*(13th ed.) (pp. 21-28). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Adjunct Faculty Academic Calendar

<u>1/6</u>	New Adjunct Faculty Orientation
<u>1/11</u>	Classes Begin
<u>1/8-1/15</u>	Late Registration
<u>1/15</u>	Last Day to Withdraw with a 100% Refund
<u>1/18</u>	MLK Day – No Classes
<u>1/18-1/22</u>	Late Course Adds only if Registered

Workshops

<u>1/5</u>	Canvas Introduction I 2:00 PM Online
<u>1/6</u>	Canvas Introduction II 2:00 PM Online
<u>1/7</u>	Canvas: Gradebook, Assignments & Rubrics 10:00 AM Online

Register for these and other workshops at: svsu.edu/workshops

Reminders

- The first week of class will be held remotely beginning January 11th
- Face to face classes begin on campus on January 19th
- Masks are required at all times when on campus
- Keep 6 feet of distance from your students and colleagues
- Be sure to send your students the expectations sheet outlining your semester plan

Common Active Learning Mistakes

By now, you are probably aware that active learning is a best practice in undergraduate education and it also qualifies as a high impact practice. However, if your students are accustomed to traditional lecture classes, they might mistake your use of an active learning exercise as a game and not necessarily one that is geared to learning. Felder and Brent, in their book, *Teaching and Learning STEM: A Practical Guide*, describe six common active learning mistakes and offer methods to avoid these mistakes.

Mistakes	Methods to Avoid Mistakes
Plunge into active learning with no explanation	<i>Set the stage:</i> first explain what you're going to do and why the active learning exercise is in the students' best interests
Expect all student to eagerly get into groups the first time you ask them to	<i>Be proactive:</i> consult with reluctant students in the first few group activities
Make activities trivial	<i>Create challenging activities:</i> Make active learning challenging enough to justify the time it takes to do them
Make activities too long, such as assigning an entire problem in a single activity	<i>Keep activities short:</i> Activities need to be short and focused (five seconds to three minutes) and break large problems into smaller chunks
Call for volunteers after every activity	<i>Give every student a chance to debrief:</i> After some activities, call randomly on individuals or groups to report their results
Fall into a predictable routine	<i>Don't be predictable:</i> Vary the formats and lengths of activities and the intervals between them

Set the stage: If you plan to use active learning exercises throughout the semester, begin by doing so on the first day. This prepares the students for what to expect as the semester progresses. There typically are some students who resist active learning, so discuss the exercises with your students and let them know the rationale behind engaging in active learning.

Be proactive: Those students who are used to active learning will jump right into the activity, however, those who are not used to such experiences may opt to work alone. Don't be discouraged by this behavior. If some students do opt to work alone, ask them to please work with their group, and they probably will. By the time you have employed active learning exercises three or four times, all students typically are willingly to participate.

Create challenging activities: Make the activity something that is challenging and one which will not make your students feel as though such learning activities are trivial. Students who feel that their time is being wasted might come to resent you and your class.

Keep activities short: It is important to remember that some students struggle more than others. Those who don't struggle might complete an activity in just a few minutes; where those who do struggle, might take up to ten minutes or more and still not be able to solve the problem. To help the latter student, shorter activities (five seconds to three minutes) allow the struggling students to get feedback early so they don't get frustrated.

Give every student a chance to debrief: After completing an activity, it is important to debrief and go over what the students' learned. By throwing out a question during the debriefing and getting volunteer responses, you are only hearing from those students who are more assertive. This then, leaves out the more introverted students who might have a lot to offer but who will just leave it up to others to answer. So, call on students randomly allowing all of the students in your class a voice.

Don't be predictable: The key to active learning is to mix things up! You need to vary the kind of work you do in the classroom so that it doesn't become predictable. You can accomplish this by varying the activities, their duration, and the size of the groups.

Active learning is a great tool which can help students succeed. But if it doesn't always work the way you want, take some time to reflect on these suggestions.

Reference:

Felder, R.M., & R. Bret. (2016). *Teaching and Learning STEM: A Practical Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (pp. 111-130).