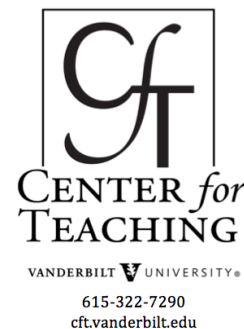


# First Day of Class

The first day of class is your opportunity to present your vision of the class to prospective students. It is helpful if you can introduce yourself as a scholar and educator and provide insight into how you will teach the class and what you will expect them to contribute to the learning process.



Consider that several of your students may be “shopping” for a schedule the first week of classes. They may be looking for a class that will fill a particular time slot, include a particular learning environment (i.e. lab-based or lecture style), or a class with a certain workload to balance the demands of their other courses and extra-curricular responsibilities. Thus, students will appreciate a clear roadmap of what you will require of them over the course of the semester. You may also want to model, as specifically as possible, the classroom environment you intend to foster during the class. For example, if they will spend a good deal of time doing group work over the course of the semester, you may want to break them into groups the first day.

## Welcoming: How to Create an Inviting Classroom

“Professors who established a special trust with their students often displayed the kind of openness in which they might, from time to time, talk about their intellectual journey, its ambitions, triumphs, frustrations, and failures, and encourage students to be similarly reflective and candid.”

–From the chapter “How Do They Treat Their Students” in Ken Bain’s *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Harvard Press, 2004), available in the [CFT Library](#)

## Introduce Yourself

The point of an introduction is to establish yourself as a unique individual sharing the classroom with other unique individuals. Other than providing your name and the name of the course you’re teaching, here is some information you may consider sharing:

- Personal biography: your place of birth, family history, educational history, hobbies, sport and recreational interests, how long you have been at the university, and what your plans are for the future.
- Educational biography: how you came to specialize in your chosen field, a description of your specific area of expertise, your current projects, and your future plans.
- Teaching biography: how long have you taught, how many subjects/classes have you taught, what level of class you normally teach, what you enjoy about being in the classroom, what do you learn from your students, and what you expect to teach in the future.
- In making your decision about what information to share, consider how much you want them to know and how much you want to reveal about yourself.

## Allow the Students to Introduce Themselves

This is your opportunity to focus on students as unique and diverse individuals. Consider how introductions can lead into a productive and welcoming classroom environment. Instead of just asking general questions

concerning their name, major, and years at Vanderbilt, ask them questions that are pertinent to the subject and the atmosphere you want to build through the semester. Here are some examples:

- In a geography or history class, you may want to ask students to introduce themselves and explain where they are from. You could mark these places on a map of the world as they talk.
- In a math class, you may want to ask the students to introduce themselves and state one way mathematics enriches their lives every day.
- You may also want to have the students break into pairs, exchange information, and introduce one another to the class.

This may also be a good time to give your students an exercise that enables teachers to assess the state of their students' previous or current learning. Examples of these [Classroom Assessment Techniques](#) (CATs) can be found on our Web site, but include the following.

- The *Background Knowledge Probe* is a short, simple questionnaire given to students at the start of a course, or before the introduction of a new unit, lesson or topic. It is designed to uncover students' pre-conceptions about the area of study.

## Discuss and Evaluate the Room Environment Together

As your students are introducing themselves and you are talking to them, ask your students to comment on the acoustics and remain conscious of how well you can hear and see each of them. Consider, with their input or alone, how you would change and optimize the seating arrangement. At the end of the introductions, ask them to move to optimize communication and make note of unexpected needs for a microphone, lighting changes, seating arrangements or other environmental controls.

## Truth in Advertising: Course Expectations and Requirements

“What happens between you and your students in your classroom or lecture hall depends largely on what you want to happen. How you treat each other and how you and your students feel about being in that place with each other is modeled and influenced by you.”

–From the chapter “Classroom Contracts–Roles, Rules, and Expectations” in David W. Champagne’s *The Intelligent Professor’s Guide to Teaching* (Roc Edtech, 1995), available in the [CFT Library](#)

- **Course overview:** Provide a map of where the class will start and end, and what you expect them to understand at the end of the semester. See the [Course Design](#) page for resources on creating and summarizing course goals.
- **Departmental Requirements/Expectations:** If your department sets standards and requirements, you may want to establish that you are required to work within those parameters. Vanderbilt Teaching Assistants may want to refer to [Questions TAs Might Ask Their Supervisors](#) for assistance understanding this information. This may be the best time to discuss [Vanderbilt University’s Honor System](#).
- **Presentation of material:** Tell your students how you will provide them with the materials they need to be successful in class. Do you post Web-based materials on [Brightspace](#), or rely on electronic course

reserves through the Library? Will your students have to schedule evenings to watch films or attend performances? Will you lecture and expect them to take notes on your presentations?

- **Expectations for class time:** How will the student feel confident and competent in your classroom? Is the class discussion-based? Do you follow your syllabus or do you improvise? Do they need to bring their books every day? Tell them what they can expect and how can they interact within those expectations to thrive in your classroom.
- **Expectations outside of class:** Provide them with an idea of what they will need to prepare for the course outside of class. Is their preparation primarily reading and writing individually, or will they be working in groups? Will they need to turn in assignments electronically outside of class hours? Give them enough information so they will be able to plan their schedules accordingly.

- **Instructor responsibilities:**
  - Establish what you will provide for your students to be successful in your class. This may include in-class material, study guides, meaningful and prompt feedback on assignments, facilitation of discussion, attention to students with special needs, and a positive and welcoming classroom environment.
  - Assert your boundaries: Let your students know how to contact you and when. For example communicate or provide your office hours, office phone number, availability for instant messaging, email, and when you do not respond (evenings, weekends, and traveling for example). If you are traveling during the semester, you may want to explain the dates that you will not be available.
  - You may also want to alert your students to the events, habits, or situations that detract from your ability to fulfill your responsibility. For example, if late assignments, lack of participation, or sleeping during your lectures distracts you from timely and persuasive teaching, explain why you cannot tolerate these events and how you handle them when they occur.
- **Student responsibilities:** If attendance is required, participation is mandatory, or you want them to read the assignment before class, explain to your students that this is expected of them throughout the semester. Explain policies on absences, make-ups, emergencies, and accommodating special needs. You may also remind them that they are responsible for their success and communicating with you when they have need assistance or have other concerns. The university launched new [Title IX and Student Discrimination](#), [Student Access Services](#) and [Equal Employment Opportunity](#) offices to serve students, faculty and staff Jan 15, 2018.
- **Assessment:** How will you assign the course grade at the end of the semester? How many assignments will you grade? Do you have grading policies and/or rubrics or criteria for grading?
- **Cooperation/communication/resources:** Finally, you may want to spend a few minutes discussing university, department, library, or other resources for students to use in through the course of the semester.

“By giving students an interesting and inviting introduction, I was able to reduce anxiety about the course and help students view the class as a collaborative learning process. Every field has its own exciting research or striking examples, and it is a good idea to present a few of these up front. The teaching challenge is to find special ideas within your own field. Your class will thank you.”

–From “How to Start Teaching a Tough Course: Dry Organization Versus Excitement on the First Day of Class” by Kevin L. Bennett, in *College Teaching*, 52(3), 2004

## Additional Resources

- Angelo, T. A., and Cross, K. P. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*. (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.
- Erickson, B. L., and Strommer, D. W. *Teaching College Freshmen*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.
- “The First Day of Class: Advice and Ideas.” *Teaching Professor*, 1989, 3(7), 1-2.
- Johnson, G. R. *Taking Teaching Seriously*. College Station: Center for Teaching Excellence, Texas A & M University, 1988.
- McKeachie, W. J. *Teaching Tips*. (8th ed.) Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1986.
- Scholl-Buckwald, S. “The First Meeting of Class.” In J. Katz (ed.), *Teaching as Though Students Mattered*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 21. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.

- Serey, T. "Meet Your Professor." *Teaching Professor*, 1989, 3(1), 2.
- Weisz, E. "Energizing the Classroom." *College Teaching*, 1990, 38(2), 74-76.
- Wolcowitz, J. "The First Day of Class." In M. M. Gullette (ed.), *The Art and Craft of Teaching*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Other Vanderbilt Center for Teaching Resources:

- [Teaching Resources](#)

## Summary Checklist

- Introduce yourself
- Allow the Students to introduce themselves
- Discuss and evaluate the room environment together
- Course overview
- Departmental requirements/expectations
- Presentation of material
- Expectations for class time
- Expectations outside of class
- Instructor responsibilities
- Student responsibilities
- Assessment
- Cooperation/communication/resources



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