

Leveraging the First Day of Class

As many of you are preparing to begin teaching soon, August's topic relates to leveraging the first day of class. With careful planning, you can ensure that by the end of the first class students understand what is expected of them and what they can expect of you.

Teaching tip: Set expectations by establishing tone, clarifying the syllabus, and measuring students' prior knowledge

First impressions make a big difference, and students will interpret the tone of the course from the way the first day is conducted. **Set high expectations while maintaining approachability.** Conveying your high expectations, along with your confidence that students have the capacity to achieve those expectations, can improve students' motivation, their perceptions of you, and their perceptions of the course itself ([Cohen et al., 1999](#)). Emphasize that you are there to support their learning, including your willingness to implement appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities.

Because the learning objectives and syllabus will guide the course, it's critical that students understand them from the beginning. **Encourage students to engage with the syllabus.** When students interact with content, they retain more than when they act as passive listeners ([Freeman et al. 2014](#)). For example, after giving students time to read the syllabus, task them with finding course-related information by putting them into small groups and giving them a short time to answer ten questions about the syllabus. This will convey the message that relevant course information is in the syllabus and that students should check there before asking you. ([Weimer, 2013](#)).

Students' prior knowledge (or lack thereof) can impact subsequent learning ([Ambrose et al., 2010](#)). Take time during the first day of class to measure the extent and quality of students' prior knowledge. **Ask students to complete a diagnostic pre-assessment.** For example, ask students to create a concept map of their understanding of prerequisite knowledge using a free 30-day license for [webspirationpro](#). Alternatively, administer a quiz that includes concepts or calculations related to the course content. Grade for completion rather than correctness.

References

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