

Model Active Learning from or before the First Class

Here are two techniques I have had success with in my own teaching. I hope the same is true for you.

Whether you teach online, face to face, or a mix, try one or both of these ideas:

1. A week or two before your course begins, send an email to your students (usually possible via your course registration system). Welcome students to your course (remind them of location and time if you wish), then ask them one or two simple questions. Let them know that you will incorporate responses, anonymously, into the opening of the course. (Adjust the phrase 'this course' to the actual name of yours if you wish.

Questions I have asked include:

- What is one thing you are looking forward to in this course?
- How might you help to make this course a success?
- What is one question you have about this course?
- In what way will you contribute to this course?

I have collated the responses, then either incorporated them into aspects of the course (such as to introduce a section or topic), or focused the first day on the students' voices.

2. Your course surely has an outline or syllabus that is shared with students before, or on the first day. If you currently 'walk through' the syllabus with your students on the first day, try, instead, to ask them to work in pairs or trios to see what questions they have about you or the course. Give them 5-10 minutes, then ask what they came up with. If your class is large and face to face, ask for questions from different physical places in the room. If online, find another way to get samples of questions. If your class is small and you have enough time, you might respond to all questions during class. Otherwise, encourage students to email or come to you in person with their questions. This technique focuses the syllabus on your students, what they most want to know. You can still bring up a few key points that were not addressed.

I wish you well in using one or both of these techniques. It can be a great way to set the tone, showing your students that you care about their views and opinions, and that you will make the course as active as possible.

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