

Strategies for Learning Names in Large Classes

Purpose: To help build rapport and show students that you care about them as individuals even in large class settings. Learning names makes people feel valued. Small interventions can make big differences.

Strategy One (Dee Fink)

I used small groups extensively in my large Geography course. After forming the groups on the first day of class, I took a Polaroid picture of each group, and they wrote their names by their individual picture. I then posted these pictures by my desk in my office and worked on learning the names within each group. After learning the names in the first group, I would learn a new group and review the names in the previous groups, and so on. I took a week or two to get them all done, but I eventually did. It was a lot easier to memorize 12 groups of 6 students, than it was to memorize 72 students.

Strategy Two (Dee Fink)

A math professor used assigned seating, made a chart, and then each day of class, worked on memorizing a block of 6 students (3 in front and 3 behind). Each day when he came to class, he made a point of visiting with students in each new block and in the ones he had already learned—in addition to the class in general.

Strategy Three (Gerry Wojnar)

I memorize my roll sheets about a week before classes start, reciting names forwards and backwards. Then on the first day of class, I go around the room identifying students, and half the work is already done—with their names already in memory, the task is simply to match names and faces. It helps to give students some short task at that point (e.g., filling out basic background info cards), during which time I cycle through my roll sheet trying to identify all students. For a few I'll call out their names while they work. Lastly, I'll try to revisit names and faces by going around the room to recite all the students' names, preferably without reference to the roll sheet.

Strategy Four (Gerry Wojnar)

A mandatory office visit from students in the first 10 days of the semester, even if just to say hello, also helps. Such break-the-ice visits also seem to promote more content-focused office visits as the semester progresses.

Strategy Five (Kejing Liu)

I manage to remember my students' names first by asking them to make a name card and place it at the table—this will help me relate the name with the seat, and then by encouraging them to sit at the same seat for next two or three class meetings.

Strategy Six (Kejing Liu)

I always ask my classes to fill out a student information card with the following information:

Course Number _____

Name: _____ Name you like to be called: _____

1 word for your learning style: _____

2 words for your interests: _____, _____

3 words for your personality: _____, _____, _____

4 words for your beliefs in children: _____, _____, _____.

I am an Early Childhood faculty, which explains why I ask for their beliefs in children. Try it, and you will learn a lot of interesting things about your students – it will help you a lot to remember your students very quickly.

Strategy Seven (Susan Robison)

Have students make name "tents" out of cardboard or card stock that you provide. They raise their tent every time they wish to be called on. They can also put the tent on their desk so as they do projects, labs, or group work you can associate the names and faces. With both of these approaches, you have to decide if you will collect the tents and bring them to class or trust the students to bring them.

Strategy Eight (Susan Robison)

If you have access to student photos [as we do at UTSA], you can make a seating chart and study the pictures and names before the course even starts.

Strategy Nine (Susan Robison)

When the students come for office hours, ask, "Please remind me your name." Take notes on the meeting especially on any follow up you promise to do.

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