**Ideas for a Great Start to the Semester Using a Learner-**

 **Centered Environment**

The following list of ideas is offered in the spirit of getting the semester off to a great start. These suggestions have been gathered from professors at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Iowa State University, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, and other institutions; and from the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) staff at Iowa State University. They are offered to help you:

* create a welcoming atmosphere for students;
* set a positive tone for learning;
* engage the students actively;
* provide support for students; and
* encourage students to keep up and do well.

**![C:\Users\abucalos\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\F6LMFWFC\welcome_mat-e1308457004111-300x206[1].jpg]()Create a welcoming atmosphere:**

* Come a few minutes early and engage students in conversation.
* Greet students at the door when they enter the classroom.
* Start your classes on time to set the appropriate model.
* Provide supplemental study aids: on library use, study tips, supplemental readings and exercises. Or, post these on your Moodle course information.
* Seek out a different student each day and get to know something about him or her.
* Share your philosophy of teaching with your students.
* Make an effort to learn at least a few of the students’ names each day.
* Find out about students’ jobs: if they are working, how many hours a week, and what kinds of jobs they hold.
* Find out more about your students by having them provide information on an index card. (Where are they from? Do they have a second major or declared minor?) and then use this information to engage students.
* Conduct a "living" demographic survey by having students move to different parts of the classroom: size of high school, rural vs. urban, consumer preferences.
* Encourage your students to find a "buddy" with whom they can exchange e-mail or texts and keep in touch about assignments and coursework.
* Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.
* Encourage students to form study groups to operate outside the classroom.

**![C:\Users\abucalos\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\F6LMFWFC\boek[1].jpg]()Set a positive tone:**

* Include content, not just syllabus and "housekeeping" details, from the very first day of class.
* Take attendance via roll call, clipboard, sign-in sheet, seating chart.
* Explain why this course is necessary, important, exciting; tell about your current research interests and how you got there.
* Have students write out their own expectations for the course and goals for learning.
* Put in writing a limited number of ground rules regarding absences, late work, testing procedures, grading, and expected behavior (for example, eating, drinking, cell phone disturbances) and maintain them.
* Start laboratory experiments or other exercises the first time lab meets.
* Call attention (written and oral) to what makes good lab practice: completing work to be done, procedures, equipment, clean up, maintenance, safety, conservation of supplies, full use of lab time.
* Tell students how much time they will need to study for the course to be successful learners.
* Explain how to study for the kind of assessments you give, and what the expectations are for grading. Show models of successful work.
* Make sample test questions and answers available.

**Encourage active learning:**

* Move around the room to engage students and to discourage behavior such as chatting or texting.
* Make eye contact with students. Choose a student, preferably by name, and alert him or her to be ready to answer the next question.
* Start a lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture, or cartoon on slide to focus on the day’s topic. Use multiple media during the class: Prezi/Power point, video or audio clips, models, and/or sample material.
* Stage a figurative "coffee break" about twenty minutes into the period: tell a story, invite students to put down pens and pencils, refer to a current event.
* Use variety in methods of presentation every class meeting: lecture, small group discussion, debate.
* Form a student panel to present alternative views of the same concept.
* Stage a change-your-mind debate, with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during the discussion.
* If you show a video or YouTube clip, think about doing it in a novel way. For example, prepare and distribute questions for students to think about while viewing; pause the video for discussion; anticipate the ending; hand out a critique sheet; play and replay parts; discuss or write answers to the questions handed out before the viewing.
* Conduct a role-play to make a point or to present issues.
* Give students an opportunity to voice opinions about the subject matter.
* Give your students time to answer questions; count slowly (and silently) to 10 after you pose a question before you rephrase it.
* Invite students to ask questions and wait for other students to respond.
* Ask follow-up questions to student responses and comments.
* Use [clickers](http://www.celt.iastate.edu/technology/clickers/) or some other way (i.e. different colored note cards) for students to vote on an issue.
* Conduct idea-generating or brainstorming sessions to expand horizons.
* Consider grading quizzes and exercises in class to promote learning.
* Make collaborative assignments for several students to work on together.
* Give students a take-home problem relating to the day’s class.
* Have students apply the course subject matter to solve real problems.
* Encourage students to bring current news items to class which relate to the subject and post these on a bulletin board.
* Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered the next class period (if at all possible).
* Have students keep three-week three-times-a-week journals in which they comment, ask questions, and answer questions about course topics.
* Invite students to critique each other’s essays or short answers on tests for readability or content.

**Encourage students to keep up and to do well:**

* Set high expectations and be explicit about what they are.
* Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty; be clear when collaboration is appropriate and when it is forbidden.
* Begin a class session with a quick summary about "last time"; end each class with a quick summary of the session and forecast of "next time" the class meets.
* Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list these on the board to be answered during class.
* Have students write down what they think the important issues or key points of the day’s session will be.
* Have students write down at the end of class three "big ideas" from that day’s material.
* Give a pre-test (ungraded or self-graded) on the day’s topic.
* Try to incorporate student reading, writing, listening, and speaking in each class period.
* Encourage your students to assume the role of a professional in the discipline: philosopher, literary critic, biologist, agronomist, political scientist, or engineer.
* Distribute a list of the unsolved problems, dilemmas, or great questions in your discipline and invite students to claim one as their own to investigate.
* Make learning goals explicit for each assignment; explain clearly what students are to do and how it fits into the course as a whole.
* Give students two passages of material containing alternative views to compare and contrast.
* Put students into pairs or threes to quiz each other over material for the day.
* Take a few minutes to allow students to explain the day’s reading to one another.
* Assign written paraphrases and summaries of difficult reading.
* Offer a chance to make "survival cards” - written notes on an assigned reading on 3×5 index cards. Collect these and return them for use on an exam.
* Make a "memory matrix," an incomplete table with row and column headings, for students to complete in pairs in class, or outside class in study groups.
* Give students plenty of opportunity for practice before a major test.
* Consider giving group quizzes, perhaps as preparation for an exam.
* Give a test early in the semester and return it graded by the next class meeting if at all possible.

**Provide support for students:**

* If possible, be aware of students who are frequently absent. Contact the student or the student’s advisor.
* Diagnose the students’ prerequisite learning by a questionnaire or pre-test and give them the feedback as soon as possible.
* Hand out study questions or study guides for each major section of the course.
* Repeat yourself. Students should hear, read, or see key material at least **three** times.
* Allow students to demonstrate progress in learning: summary quiz over the day’s work, a written reaction to the day’s material.
* Reward the behavior you want with a word of praise or a personal note on a paper.
* Use a light touch: smile, tell a good joke, and break test anxiety with a sympathetic comment or use of a cartoon before the test/quiz.
* Provide structure for visually-oriented students by posting the day’s "menu" on board, power point, or Moodle for viewing.
* Use multiple examples to illustrate key points and important concepts.
* Encourage students to print out important course dates on a card that can be taped to a mirror or on their preferred electronic device.
* Be available to students before or after class and join their conversation about course topics.

Adapted from "101 Things" by Joyce T. Povlacs, Teaching and Learning Center, University of Nebraska-Lincoln by Susan Yager, Associate Director, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Iowa State University, January 2004.