

Strategy: Getting Started the First Day of Class

Objectives:

What better time than the beginning of the semester to consider the importance of **welcoming students in your classroom**? Classroom anthropologists have identified patterns in social interaction that create expectations about how to work in the classroom.

Activities

Phase 1: Entering the Lesson

Social encounters usually begin with some action that acknowledges everyone and establishes a welcoming tone. Learning interactions are no exception. Teachers can use the moments when students are entering the classroom to build a commitment to the class. Here are some simple, but socially valuable, tips.

1. **Be Early.** Arrive 5 minutes early for class. Whether inside or outside the classroom, let students know that you are ready to talk with them: smile, nod, make eye contact, chat, whatever suits your style.
2. **Have Students Meet.** Have students greet someone else in the class. Even if this ritual takes only 30 seconds, you should find that your class warms up considerably. Add some fun: have students use greeting rituals from various cultures, or ask students to create and lead the daily greeting (no embarrassing tricks allowed).
3. **Social Ice Breakers.** While often misunderstood and over-used, the right ice breaker can help a group of students get over the chill of anonymity.

Phase 2: Start the Learning

The transition from everyday social life to learning encounters requires a shift. Students may not be ready to start work when the teacher is. Use the following tips to shift their attention to the common work of learning your lessons.

4. **Content Ice Breakers.** Short activities can be used to introduce course content. For example, list several terms from an essay and have students get a signature next to each term that a classmate knows. Or, handout a set of index cards, each containing instructions for one step in a process— such as solving a math problem. Have students form a team with those whose cards contain the other steps. Give teams a problem to solve with each student responsible for the steps listed on his or her card. Debrief results.

5. Student participation is not simply a question of motivation but one of social relations too. People work better when they are noticed and guided into the working part of the lesson smoothly. Abrupt switches will inevitably leave some students behind. Build a welcome phase and a settling down phase into the first few minutes of your lessons and you will find more students are ready to engage in the learning activities you have planned. Utilizing these interaction patterns creates a context in which social relationships focus students on the task at hand.

A Closing Routine

It is important to end your classes with routines that help students know what to take from the experience. The final moments of a class are best used to consolidate ideas and set the stage for the next meeting. Squeezing in additional information does not provide the same gains as reinforcing, summarizing, and reconnecting students to the important material. Listed below are tips for the two phases that occur at the end of most social encounters.

Phase 3: Clearing Up

6. Near the end of an interaction, people often highlight and confirm the main points of the encounter. Such "clearing up" generates immensely valuable teaching moments. Use the following tips to create reflection activities that help students re-process your lesson.
7. **Minute Paper.** Give students 1 minute to write down the main point of the lesson. Have them briefly discuss their ideas with their neighbors. You can collect & respond to their comments.
8. **Journal Entry.** Ask students to write a journal response to the lesson for several minutes. Ask us for some guiding questions.
9. **Application Cards.** Have students list 2-3 applications of the material just covered. Share responses & comments on how your lesson links to everyday settings.
10. **Debriefing.** Ask students to reflect on what worked for them in the lesson (and what didn't). Have them discuss and write down one suggestion for themselves and one for you.
11. **Feedback.** Gather some targeted feedback during the last few minutes of a class. A short survey can tell you how things are going.

Phase 4: Making A Good Exit

Social interactions end nicely when participants know what is expected at the next meeting. It is also a valuable practice to acknowledge good efforts and successes.

12. **Assignments.** Save several minutes to discuss expectations and questions about assignments.
13. **Q&A.** Open the class up to general questions and answers during the final minutes. If response is low, have students write their questions down and hand them in.
14. **Study Groups.** Allow students a couple minutes to meet their study groups (set these up beforehand) so they can make arrangements to meet or get started on homework.
15. **Rituals.** Just like greeting rituals, you can create a moment for good-bye rituals. Shake hands, have a round of applause for hard group work, or make a simple comment like, "Thank you for a good effort today, I look forward to our next class."

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