



Teaching For Success®

Quick Answers

QA 10.9.2

Q: What Is the Best Way to Start a New Class?

A: Follow These 10 Tips and You Won't Go Wrong

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1. Dress well according to the students' expectations. Wear what makes you feel comfortable and fits into the cultural norms of your institution. I always wear a coat and tie for the first week to establish a profile of someone who takes the class seriously.
2. Smile at students when they enter the classroom. This often means arriving early enough so that you are already set up at least five minutes before class starts.
3. Establish and maintain eye contact. This applies to when you meet the students on the first day of class, and also during the lecture. One technique while lecturing is to hold your gaze on one student for about five seconds, then move your gaze to another student in a different part of the room for five seconds. This seems to give the impression of direct eye contact to the largest number of other students.
4. Be the first to say hello. Students are often a little nervous and apprehensive the first day. They generally expect the teacher to make the first move. Vary your greetings so that it does not sound too robotic.
5. Learn your students' names as quickly as possible. There are many established techniques for doing this. I bring a digital camera the first day and take pictures row-by-row. Then, I print them and ask students to print their name next to their face. This gives me an easy way to learn their names. I have also experimented with name tags and named desk tents over the years. Name mastery comes with use so use and repeat students' name enough times that you commit them to memory.
6. Your students need and want to hear and understand what you are saying. Don't speak too quietly or too loudly. Speaking in a hushed tone may be interpreted as a sign of insecurity. On the other hand, some people equate loudness with rudeness. How do you know how you are doing in this area? Ask! And always, look for signs of hearing frustration, pained expressions, or tuning out and not paying attention.
7. Observe basic rules of politeness and etiquette and insist your students do too. Don't interrupt the student or cut them off by acting distracted, or critical. Offer them an out when asking them a question they have difficulty answering, such as, "Would you like to use a lifeline"?
8. Be aware of the nonverbal signals that you are projecting. Besides eye contact, this could include the tone of your voice, expression on your face, posture, gestures, and how excited you are about the class. Spend some time before the students arrive to relax and put yourself into a positive mental state.
9. Remember the "credibility pyramid." For teachers and public speakers, the top two characteristics are a caring attitude and enthusiasm for the subject you are speaking about. Once again, spend a few minutes to put yourself into the right mental state. Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.
10. You've heard, "Be prepared on the first day of class!" That means writing a detailed instructional plan for you and distributing a detailed syllabus to your students. Don't waste time the first class meeting. Students form an immediate impression of you based on how motivated, committed, and organized and you are at the first class session. Finally, adopt a bias for action; get going on instructional tasks the very first class session.

