

First Day in the Classroom Considerations

1. Preparation

a. The classroom before classes begin

- ✓ How large must you write on the white board/chalk board to be able to “see” from the very last row? Is your handwriting legible?
- ✓ If you take a friend along you can practice how loudly you must speak to be heard in the last row. Remember with a room full of people your volume must increase. What are you going to do to increase clarity of your spoken words if, for example, you have an accent that might be difficult to understand? Dr. Marcia Wong at the University Teaching Center administers the SPEAK Test and has a class GRAD 697d Learner Centered Teaching for International Teaching Assistants. Check out the UTC website at www.utc.arizona.edu follow the links for International TAs and/or the Certificate in College Teaching
- ✓ Walk around the room. Are there places that it is difficult to see the board or the screen? Get comfortable moving in your classroom space.
- ✓ What technology do you have already in the room? Do you know how to work it? You can call the University Teaching Center Equipment Services for a free “tutorial” of all the equipment. Many rooms are locked when classes are not in session. They have the key and will be happy to meet you. To make an appointment call 621-3852 or visit the website at www.uaav.arizona.edu What AV equipment will you need that is NOT in the classroom? Again the UTC Equipment Services department has equipment they will deliver to your classroom. Request forms are on their website.

b. Departmental concerns such as what class you are assigned to teach, lead discussion, assist in grading, holding office hours, etc are best addressed through the department that has hired you.

- ✓ Each department has an Administrative Assistant and/or a Graduate Advisor, if you are unclear about any aspect of your assignment, check with them to see who has been assigned as your supervisor.
- ✓ Some departments have classes and/or regularly scheduled meetings for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA).
- ✓ In departments that use GTAs regularly, there will be experienced GTAs available.
- ✓ If you are teaching a class, there are usually syllabi from previous classes available to you. Additionally, often the syllabus for a class has already been constructed and the textbooks ordered.
- ✓ For teaching assistance, the University Teaching Center is available to assist you. You can call the main number 621-7788 or visit our website at www.utc.arizona.edu If you would like to further develop your teaching expertise, please follow the link to the Certificate in College Teaching.

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2. The First Day of Class

a. Welcome, Introductions, Setting the Class Tone

- ✓ Welcome students as they enter the room. Sometimes just making small talk before class begins helps to relieve your anxiety and theirs.
- ✓ Write your name on the board and introduce yourself.
- ✓ Write the name and section of the class on the board. First day of class confusion someone might have arrived in the wrong room!
- ✓ Express your interest in working with them throughout the semester.
- ✓ Tell them that class will begin and end on time. In a 10 year study by Robert Boice, it was clearly shown that 70% of classroom incivilities were perpetrated by the professor not the students! Starting class late and allowing it to run late were huge infractions that communicated disrespect to the students.
- ✓ *Have a “get to know you” kind of introduction activity.* I strongly encourage the use of a timer and taking notes about the students as they share – it’s a great way to begin learning names and taking attendance and you’ll hear what they “want” to learn from the class.
 - For example: You post on the board or power point slide Working in pairs you will each have 1 minute to introduce yourself what one concept would you like to learn from this class this semester
 - You will each take turns introducing each other to the class
- ✓ The next order of business is the syllabus. DO NOT hand out the syllabus and dismiss class expecting them to read and understand it. Also by dismissing class early on the first day, you are communicating that class time is NOT important!

b. The Syllabus

- ✓ I often use the metaphor of a “journey” to explain the trip we’ll take over the course of the semester. As I hand out the syllabus, I tell them it is the guide for our trip. It will tell them exactly what they can expect as we travel together.
- ✓ Review the syllabus with them. If they are new students to higher education, they may have never used a syllabus before. *This is another great place to put in an interactive activity.* You could divide the syllabus into sections and assign small groups (4-6 students) to review that portion together and report out to the class. When the review is complete, I ask basic questions such as:
 - What is the name of your textbook?
 - When is your first assignment due?
 - Where do you go to pick up the class packet of notes?
 - What is plagiarism?
 - What is the penalty for plagiarism?
 - When are my office hours?
 - Encourage them to reread the syllabus and come to the next class with questions, etc.
- ✓ I tell them there could be a quiz on the syllabus during the next class.

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- ✓ The second day of class I actually give a “quiz” over the syllabus! It doesn't have points connected to it; I don't tell them that. This allows me to review the important points of the syllabus and clearly show them it is **the** guide we will follow.
- c. Start Teaching! Establishing Interest and Relevance
- ✓ Prepare a power point presentation overview of the interesting and relevant information students will gain from taking the class. Just as you want to go to see a movie that created interest in the topic for you, the content you are teaching has interesting and relevant information for your students. This is not to say there may not be boring or rote types of learning that must be mastered because every discipline has foundational information that one must master to be able to move on. However, here is where you can shine and show them why you found your discipline exciting and worthy of study. Research shows us without question that it is the passion and enthusiasm of the teacher that motivates students to learn. When you are excited and interested in the subject matter they see that and they respond. Ask yourself, how will their lives be improved by learning this material? How will they be better able to deal in their world by learning this subject? How can you show them that if they are patient and truly apply themselves to the task of learning this subject their lives will be enriched?
 - ✓ This time also allows them to ask you questions.
- d. Basic Considerations
- ✓ **Wait time** is a concept that refers to the amount of time a teacher should wait after asking a question. Often one thinks they wait a long time however most wait about 2-3 seconds. That is not long enough for a student to think about what you've been saying and formulate a question. Plan on waiting at least 10 seconds this communicates that you truly WANT them to ask questions and you are prepared to wait for them. I taught myself this skill by asking a question and then silently counting 1-1000, 2-1000, 3-1,000 etc up to 10-1000.
 - ✓ **Adult attention span** refers to how long an average adult can stay attentive in a class/lecture type format. Plan to have some type of activity where they must process the information you have just presented about every 10 minutes. It can be as simple as asking them to explain the concept you just presented to the person sitting next to them. Then going around the room asking them what they discussed. This is a type of informal assessment and can be a powerful memory tool. This process need take on a minute or two of class time.
 - ✓ **Critical Reflection** an end of class strategy that can provide you with informal feedback about what they believe they learned, what they are remembering as class ends and what they may still be confused about. This technique also begins the first important step in memory processing, that is, to review as soon as possible the important points of a class. Index cards are a perfect way to get brief, concise feedback.

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References

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