First Day of Class Objectives: What Three Experts Say

Ken Bain
What the Best College Teachers Do
Chapter 2

1. Determine Students’ Misconceptions about the Discipline (aka, Assessing Prior Knowledge and Tangled Knowledge)

Students often hold firm to mistaken beliefs, even when confronted with phenomena that contradicts those beliefs (p. 23). To uncover these misconceptions on the first day of class, ask students to define and explain a few key concepts from the course. From this pre-assessment of student tangles (James Zull’s word from The Art of Changing the Brain), the instructor knows what to untangle before accurate student learning can replace it.

2. Discuss the BIG (sometimes called ESSENTIAL) Questions the Course will Answer

Bain suggests that on the first day of class, instructors discuss with students the questions the course will help students answer. This gives students some control over their education, connects with current topics, and focuses on some of the students’ questions (p. 36).

Bill McKeachie
Teaching Tips, 12th edition, 2006
Chapter 3

Some of Bill’s Suggestions:

3. Set the Stage = Arrange room, post agenda, name on board, chat informally before class to determine interests.

4. Break the Ice = Get acquainted, start to learn names, establish goals, get emails (CynD: Ask students to exchange emails with 3 others who can be asked by the student to collect missed assignments, notes, chat, etc.).

5. Introduce the Syllabus = Help students understand the plan, and rationale for, the course structure, objectives, assignments, timelines, etc. (CynD: I have students read the syllabus independently for 10 minutes then give them a quiz on it; the quiz questions are regarding the points commonly misunderstood or ignored about the syllabus by previous students in the same course).
6. **Introduce the Textbook(s)** = Explain their role in your course (CynD: Do the same for the technology you will be using).

7. **What about Subject Matter?** = Teach a few key concepts (CynD: To send an early message that *learning is what we do here*, as opposed to dismissing early).

8. **Questions and Reactions** = Ask for student questions, many of which will be designed to learn about you (Are you a rigid grader?).

**Linda Nilson**

*Teaching at Its Best, 2nd edition, 2003*

*Chapter 7*

And now, a few ideas from my good friend Linda! (She has many of the same ideas expressed above by Bain and Bill.)

9. Say a few words to market the course and the materials. Enthusiasm is contagious.

10. Since you expect students to be prompt, start class on time.

11. If you think you’ll have stage fright, practice your first-day presentation in advance.

12. **Information flow should be a two-way street.**

Tell students something about yourself, not divulging your life history, but educational and professional background. Perhaps give the students a survey to learn something about them (CynD: So that you might discuss their interests during class breaks and warm-up the climate with some students if need be: “I recall that you received a gymnastics scholarship to Berkeley. I’m so impressed! What was your favorite/best event?”). In this book Linda has many examples of icebreakers for both introductions to classmates and introductions to the subject matter.

Cynthia Desrochers, ELIXR

http://elixr.merlot.org/