

## Expert Insights

**Narrator** [00:00:00] Think back to when you were a student and any fond memories of the first day of class. What likely doesn't make the top 10 list was when your professor read the syllabus aloud in its entirety and slowly put you and your friends to sleep. Although it's important to clarify course goals and your expectations, research shows that the first day is a rare opportunity to build a sense of community and model an active learning environment. Doing so improves student motivation and learning. As the saying goes, there really isn't a second chance to make a first impression.

**Linda Nilson, PhD, Higher Ed. Education Expert & Author, Clemson University** [00:00:36] The first day of class is probably the most important day of class that you'll ever have, and therefore it requires a lot of special preparation because what you're going to have to do, you're going to have to, you're not just going to be talking about material, getting students into activities about the material. You're going to be introducing them to what this course, this class is going to be like.

**Narrator** [00:01:03] Beyond printing the syllabus and writing your name on the board, prepare and practice a short welcome. Share a little about your background, education, and research interests. Include something personal, like a favorite hobby. Convey your passion for the subject and what might excite your students too. We learn from one another, and these kinds of humanizing details motivate students to learn more from you. On the first day, arrive early to acclimate to the room and set up any technology. To avoid fumbling with projectors and control panels during precious class time, make sure to have a low-tech backup too, just in case.

**Linda Nilson, PhD** [00:01:43] You don't know what will happen with technology. It's not that reliable. So yes, you should always have a plan B if possible, a low-tech alternative, even if it's just a handout or something that you're going to put on the board. For instance, one thing you want to do that first day is you're going to want to put, like, an agenda for that first day on the board, on a slide, wherever. This shows you're in command, you've got a plan. This is your class and you've got it together. You're the leader.

**Narrator** [00:02:16] To build a sense of community, greet students as they enter and start to learn their names. An academic icebreaker can help students get to know each other and introduce the course. For example, give a short no-stakes quiz on popular topics that the course covers. After students work individually for a few minutes, organize them into small groups. Have them introduce themselves and discuss their responses to the work. Then review the correct answers with the whole class to connect their current knowledge or misconceptions to material you'll cover in the term. Another way to build community is to welcome questions tangibly. From day one and onward, arrive with a stack of Post-it Notes for students to write questions that come to mind. Notes can be posted anonymously to a designated wall, collected for class discussions or as students leave for the day. Regardless of the method, be sure to use the notes as a diagnostic to learn what students might be grappling with and discuss reoccurring questions the next time you meet. It is important to establish course expectations, but there are more engaging ways than reciting the syllabus. For example, ask students to review the syllabus for a few minutes and identify key details. Then lead a discussion to see what they took away and emphasize anything they missed. They'll retain more from this active approach. The reciprocal interview is another way to show that you expect two-way communication. Once students have

reviewed the syllabus, ask them to interview you about the learning outcomes you've set, the readings you've assigned, and the assignments required. You should also interview them to learn how the course meets their goals and expectations and how it could be adjusted for added relevance.

**Linda Nilson, PhD** [00:03:59] It's also a good idea if you get students talking about what their expectations of the course are, what they want to learn, what, what their expectations are of you. This will give you a lot of information about what students value. And it's, it's almost, it's almost like a tip-off to the sorts of things you're going to focus on in your, your mid-semester feedback sessions.

**Narrator** [00:04:30] Finally, don't let day one just be about goals and classroom culture. Teach! Plan and deliver a mini-lesson of around 15 minutes and be sure to include an active learning technique similar to the ones you'll use in the semester. This gets students actively engaged in the subject matter and models what's to come.

**Linda Nilson, PhD** [00:04:50] It is critically important that your first day be modeled on what you're planning to do the whole semester. So if you're going to have students doing a lot of discussion, you have to get them involved in a discussion. If you're going to have them do writing exercises, you have to do a writing exercise. If you're going to have group work, get them into groups to do something together. And this sets, this sets expectations for them as to what the rest of the classes are going to be like.

**Narrator** [00:05:20] With a dynamic first day, there's no chance of anyone falling asleep and you've launched your class into the start of a successful semester.