

Ideas for First Day Activities

Compiled by the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence

Activities that help students identify what to expect (How and Why)

Syllabus Activity (from *Teaching What You Don't Know*)

Goals: explore how course is designed, clarify expectations and how students and instructor can help students meet them, answer student questions about the course

Step1: students form small groups or pairs, introduce themselves

Step 2: groups take 5-10 minutes to read syllabus

Step 3: groups discuss and take notes on their responses to questions. Some examples of questions you can give students are:

- Looking at the course objectives, what other classes have you had that will be helpful?
- Looking at the course calendar, what topics interest you most? The least?
- What do you want or expect from the professor?
- Identify two or three things in the syllabus that concern you.
- What strategies could you use to address those concerns?
- When do you plan to submit your first project for a grade? What do you think it will cover?
- List three questions you have about the course that are not answered in the syllabus.

Activities that show students in-class time is valuable

Examples of reflection activities

Students respond to this prompt: "List 3 key things you learned, 2 questions you have, and 1 thing you're going to apply/do".

Know/Want to Know/Learned ([KWL](#)): A technique highlighting three basic cognitive steps students take to learn course material. Originally developed for reading assignments, it can be adapted for in-class activities.

[Exit Tickets](#) gauge how students are thinking about material in class. Students respond to a specific prompt, question, or problem and submit it at the end of class session. The Exit Ticket can have any format, focus, or content.

Activities that identify what students already know, and potential barriers to student learning

A brief, anonymous, optional survey, such as the “Who’s in Class?” [Survey](#) can help you get to know your students. You can adapt this version for your class.

Pretests or questionnaires can help you and students identify and activate what they know, what prerequisite materials they need to brush up on, and what they will focus on learning during the term.

Examples of knowledge check surveys

[Misconception/Preconception check](#)

Check to see if your own discipline has specific inventories (e.g., Physics Force Concept [Inventory](#))

Sources

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