

# 100 Tips and Tools for the First Three Weeks of Class

The following tips and tools are a collection of ideas for the first three weeks of class. These ideas help establish a positive classroom climate, build a classroom community, establish expectations and guidelines for performance, engage students in active learning, provide feedback on student performance, and assess learning outcomes. Many of these strategies are well known among college teachers. Some are originals offered during workshops. All are valuable tips and tools for setting teachers and students up for success in the classroom!

1. Hit the ground running on the first day of class with substantial content.
2. Introduce yourself by slide, videotape, short presentation or self-biography.
3. Hand out an informative, attractive and user-friendly syllabus.
4. Give an assignment on the first day to be collected at the next meeting.
5. Start laboratory experiments and other exercises on the first time the lab meets.
6. Call attention (written and oral) to good learning habits: completing assignments on time, previewing scheduled topics, regularly reviewing material covered and full use of lab time with regard for safety.
7. Learn student's names and use them in class.
8. Give a learning style inventory to help students find out about themselves
9. Refer students who need help with basic skills to the counseling center.
10. Tell students how much time they will need to study for this course.
11. Hand out supplemental study aids: library use, study tips, supplemental readings and practice exercise.
12. Explain how to study for the kinds of tests you give.
13. List a limited number of ground rules for class include: policy regarding absences, late work, testing procedures, grading and general decorum. Maintain them.
14. Announce office hours frequently and hold them with without fail.

15. Show students how to handle learning in large classes and impersonal situations.
16. Give sample test questions and provided answers.
17. Explain the difference between legitimate collaboration and academic dishonesty: be clear when collaboration is wanted and when it is forbidden.
18. Seek out a different student each day and get to know something about him or her.
19. Find out about students' jobs: if they are working, how many hours a week and what kinds of jobs they hold.

## Directing Students' Attention

20. Greet students at the door when they enter the classroom.
21. Start the class on time.
22. Make a grand beginning to hush a large class and gain attention.
23. Give a pretest on the day's topic.
24. Start the lecture with a puzzle, question, paradox, picture or cartoon on slide or transparency to focus on the day's topic.
25. Elicit student questions and concerns at the beginning of the class and list them on the chalkboard to be answered during the hour.
26. Have students write down what they think the important issues or key points of the day's lecture will be.
27. Ask the person who is reading the student newspaper what is in the news today.

## Challenging Students

28. Have students write out their expectations for the course and their own goals for learning.
29. Use variety in methods of presentation at every class meeting.
30. Stage a "coffee break" to tell an anecdote, invite students to put down pens and pencils, refer to an event or shift media.
31. Incorporate community resources: plays, concerts, governmental agencies, and businesses.
32. Show a film in a novel way; stop it for discussion, show a few frames only, anticipate the ending, hand out a viewing or critique sheet, play and replay parts.
33. Share your philosophy of teaching with your students.
34. Form a student panel to present alternative views of the same concept.

35. Stage a change-your-mind debate, with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during discussion.
36. Conduct a “living” demographic survey by having students move to different parts of the classroom: size of high school, rural vs. urban, consumer preferences, etc.
37. Tell about your current professional interests and how you got there from your own beginnings in the content you teach.
38. Conduct a role-play to make a point or to set out issues.
39. Let your students assume the role of a professional in the discipline: biologist, philosopher, literary critic, engineer, political scientist.
40. Conduct idea generating or brainstorming sessions to expand horizons.
41. Give students two passages of material containing alternative views to compare and contrast.
42. Distribute a list of the unsolved problems, dilemmas or great questions in your discipline and invite students to claim one as their own to investigate.
43. Ask students what books they read during the last six months.
44. Ask students what is going on in the government on a subject which many affect their future.
45. Let your students see the enthusiasm you have for your subject and your love of learning.
46. Take students with you to hear guest speakers or special programs on campus.
47. Plan a “scholar-gypsy” lesson or unit that shows students the excitement of discovery in your discipline.
53. Allow students to demonstrate progress in learning; use a summary quiz over the day’s work or a written reaction to the day’s material.
54. Use non-graded feedback to let students know how they are doing; post answers to ungraded quizzes and problem sets, do exercises or give oral feedback.
55. Reward behavior you want – praise or write a note
56. Use a light touch: smile, tell a good joke or break test anxiety with a sympathetic comment.
57. Organize. Give visible structure by posting the day’s “menu” on the chalkboard or an overhead.
58. Use multiple media: overhead, slides, film, videotape, audiotape, models, sample materials.
59. Make appointments with all students – individually or in small groups.
60. Use multiple examples, in multiple media, to illustrate key points and important concepts.
61. Hand out wallet-sized telephone cards with all important telephone numbers listed: office, department, resource centers, lab.
62. Print all important course dates on a card that can be handed out and taped to a mirror.
63. Eavesdrop on students before or after class and join their conversations about course topics.
64. Maintain an open grade book, with grades kept current so that students can check their progress.
65. Check to see if any students are having problems with any academic or campus matters, and direct those who are to appropriate offices or resources.
66. Tell students what they need to do to receive and “A” or “B” in your course.
67. Stop to find out what your students are thinking, feeling and doing in their everyday lives.

### **Providing Support**

48. Collect students’ current telephone numbers and addresses and let them know that you may need to reach them.
49. Check out absentees. Call or write a personal note.
50. Diagnose the students’ prerequisite learning by questionnaire or pretest and give them the feedback as soon as possible.
51. Handout study questions of study guides
52. Be redundant. Students should see, read or hear key material at least three times.

### **Encouraging Active Learning**

68. Have students write something regularly: journal entries, course commentaries or content reports.
69. Invite students to critique for readability or content each other’s essays or short answers on tests.
70. Invite students to ask questions frequently.
71. Probe student responses to questions and their comments.
72. Put students into pairs or learning teams to quiz each other over material for the day.
73. Give students the opportunity to voice opinions about the subject matter.

74. Have students apply subject matter to solve real problems.
75. Give students red, yellow and green cards and periodically call for a vote on an issue by asking for a simultaneous show of cards.
76. Rome the aisles in your classroom and carry on running conversations with students as they work on course problems or on teams.
77. Gather feedback in the first three weeks to improve teaching and learning.
78. Ask a question directed to one student and wait for the answer.
79. Place a suggestion box in the rear of the room and encourage students to make written comments every time the class meets.
80. Do oral, show-or-hands, multiple-choice tests for summary, review and instant feedback.
81. Use task groups to accomplish specific objectives.
82. Grade quizzes and exercises in class as a learning tool.
83. Give students plenty of opportunity for practice before a major test.
84. Give a test early in the term and return it graded at the next class meeting.
85. Have students write questions on index cards to be collected and answered during the next class period.
86. Make collaborative assignments on which several students may work together
87. Assign written paraphrases and summaries of difficult reading.
88. Appoint a student volunteer weekly to as “dumb questions” for other class members.
89. Give students a take-home problem relating to the day’s lecture
90. Encourage students to bring current news items to class which relate to the subject matter and post these on a bulletin board.
91. Practice allowing sufficient “wait time” when posing questions.
95. Take pictures of students (snapshots in small groups or mug shots) and post them in your classroom, office or lab.
96. Form small groups for getting acquainted; mix and form new groups several times.
97. Assign a team project early in the term and provide time to assemble the team.
98. Solicit suggestions from students for outside resources and guest speakers on course topics.
99. Exchange a tip for successful teaching with a colleague.
100. Contact your program direction, department chair, teaching centre, staff development office for assistance in developing innovative instructional strategies.

### **Your Favorite Tips and Tools for the First Three Weeks of Class:**

#### **Team Building**

92. Use special techniques to help you learn names.
93. Set up a buddy system or helping trio so students can contact each other about assignments and course work.
94. Find out about your students through questions on an index card.