A hand holding a white chalk marker is writing on a green chalkboard. The text is written in a white, cursive font.

*What I do on the  
1<sup>st</sup> day of class...*

*Ideas, suggestions, and  
thoughts about the first day of  
class.*

## **Ideas Contributed by WKU Faculty**

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# First Days: The Impressions They Make

Faculty can sometimes struggle with how to set the tone for that first day of class. This booklet shares tried and true methods WKU faculty have used in their classes to help set the tone for the rest of the semester.



## Expectations & Snack Food

by Karl Laves, Counseling and Student Affairs & WKU Counseling Services

### *1. Establishing the way I want students to feel about the class and keeping students the entire period.*

I spend the entire period on the first day discussing my philosophy of education and the utility of my courses. I ask for input while creating a list of expectations for myself and the students. This technique is similar to "agenda setting" and "working alliance formation" in group and individual therapy. When finished, we usually have a list of things they expect of me and I expect of them. I feel this acknowledges the interdependent relationship a college instructor should have with students.

I also spend time discussing intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, and I highlight how college is a place where people are still developing autonomy. In sum, I try to get across the idea that I am not responsible for their success or failure; I am a hired professional (paid for by them) who will lead them through a course.

### *2. Ice breaking activities...*

I have used one such activity for some time now, and I think it is funny how it seems to work. I introduce myself, give a little personal history, then ask them to introduce themselves to class by telling us; (a) their name, (b) their home town, and (c) their favorite snack food. Of course, the last item usually baffles them. After the last person has spoken, I ask the class as a whole to recall the three items for each person beginning with the first person who spoke.

Most of the time, the class can remember the snack food and hometown, but they struggle with the names. I use this to point out how we are usually anxious and that interferes with name recall, yet we tend to listen well since we can recall the food. Most classes have been amazed by this and enjoy trying to remember the food. It is a less personal way to look at and talk about one another. I think the snack food is a neutral item that allows people to interact without judging or comparing. I then use this experience to introduce my course (psychology).

# Engaging the Students—Even on the First Day

by Paul Bush, Commonwealth School

Keeping the students the entire class period even on the first day of class sets the tone for the rest of the semester. Since syllabi are now on TopNet for students to preview, faculty should hit the high points of it and move on to content—those students who are wishy-washy and playing with their class schedules will have to catch up on their own time—we can't sacrifice the time and money of the many for the indecisiveness of the few.

If you feel you must go a little light on educational content on the first day, at least engage the students in other ways. Get a writing sample from them. Or do ice breakers such as the following: have the students fill a sheet of paper with a table of nine boxes with personal topics such as “person with cutest kid, sing in a choir, played a sport in high school, etc.” and have the students get the signatures, phone numbers, e-mail addresses of classmates who match those criteria so that the students feel comfortable with one another as people—after all, as we gear up on the Quality Enhancement Plan, we need to be sure that our students bond with each other, with us, with Western Kentucky University. Let's not leave them the impression on the first day that it is okay just to come to pick up a sheet of paper and go, or they may feel that they can do the same with their diploma in four years.

## Pick an Ending: Group Writing

by Katherine Pennavaria, English & Glasgow Campus Library



I always start every one of my English classes with a group exercise. I say nothing to them the first day except the name of the class and who I am -- then I tell them to break up in groups of 3 or 4. I give them a copy of the first paragraph of Frank Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and tell them they have 20-30 minutes to write, as a group, an ending to the story.

The students always have fun, and it makes them more relaxed on the first day. Here's the paragraph I use:

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back, and when he lifted his head a little, he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments, on top of which the bed quilt could hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes."



# Introducing the Course

by Arvin Vos, Philosophy and Religion

With advanced courses, I begin by having the students introduce themselves. In their introduction, they are asked to explain why they are interested in the class and to give an account of what courses they have had that will provide background for the area we will study and what topics they studied in each of those classes. This gives both their classmates and me valuable information about each person in the class. I also take time to talk about my own interest in the topic of the course, how I got interested in the area, and what fascinates me about it. In addition, I explain points in the course syllabus and introduce the textbooks, major divisions in the course, and, if there is time, introduce the first topic we will study.



With introductory classes I want the students to feel both that the class will be interesting and that it will be challenging. I explain the course syllabus and introduce the text books. If there is time, I do some Socratic type of questioning. So in Introduction to Philosophy I might ask them to explain what they think philosophy is, how wisdom differs from knowledge, information, etc. When this goes well, students leave at the end of the first hour with a sense of the method that will be used during the entire course. They also discover that philosophy is not something strange about which they know nothing, but rather a topic on which they have views that are in need of clarification and development--as are the views of their classmates. Using the entire hour is important in molding the students' expectations, showing that class time is valuable.

# Learning Names

by Bill Powell, Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport

On the first day of class, I learn every student's name and call them by it before they leave class--it doesn't matter whether there are 18 or 45 students. They all tell me their name--I repeat each name--then while they sit there I go back and name each one of them. I quite often get applause from the class when I finish naming them all. Then if they don't know my name, I get all over their case (kiddingly, of course).



# The Name Game

by Dawn Hall, Commonwealth School

Ask your students to sit in a circle and think of a hobby or activity that begins with the same letter as their first name. Beginning with a student on either side of you (making sure you go last) ask them to introduce themselves, first name only, and then say that hobby or activity that begins with the same letter as their first name. EX: My name is Dawn, and I like to Dance.

The next student has to introduce themselves and then recall all the other students' names and rhyming activity that have gone before them. That means by going last, you must remember everyone's name and hobby.

You will be amazed at how easy listing all your students' names and activities is, but most importantly, without fail, I walk away from this activity knowing everyone's name. Plus all the other students will know each others' name and possibly an interest as well. Students tend to laugh a lot during this activity, and I've found, it is a good way to introduce students, break the ice, and learn names.

Note: There are many variations to this game and one you may consider, to cut back on possible student anxiety, is to have students recall only the last three people who introduced themselves instead of all the students and their hobby or activity. Of course, *you* still have to remember everyone!

# Interviews & Introductions

by Pat Taylor, English

As an icebreaker for the first day--and I may not identify it as an icebreaker--I have students break into teams of two, interview each other, and then introduce their teammates to the rest of the class. I instruct students to find someone in the room whom they do not know. After partners have been selected, the students conduct the interviews with the goal of discovering information about each other. Each student presents his or her teammate to the class and much of the information conveyed is laced with humor and goodwill. At the end of this activity, everyone in the class will be familiar with at least one other person, and I will have some insight into a group I have just met.



I usually ask freshmen to write six questions they would like to know about the person before they break into groups. With more advanced students this may not be necessary. (Questions are to go beyond the realm of name and major!)

# A Creative Idea for Feedback: Metaphor Exercise

by Sally Kuhlenschmidt Psychology & FaCET

David Luechauer (Butler University) and Gary Shulman (Miami University) in a presentation at the Lilly Conference for College Teaching (Nov. 1995) suggested a creative means of introducing the course topic and assessing the culture and climate of the classroom. They argued that the unconscious assumptions that students bring to the classroom will color their experiences in the classroom. Typical assessments may be distorted by the students' perception of what they think we want them to say. However, the symbols, or metaphors, that students use to describe the subject matter or a classroom may reveal their assumptions and give the instructor some ideas for explaining that material to the students. See the next page for an adaptation of their questionnaire. I have used this to shed light on how students view a particular topic in my course (Replace the word "concept" with a key term for the course, e.g., KERA, evolution, justice). Understanding their values and emotional reactions has been helpful to me in structuring the material and in interpreting it to the students. My students reflect on their self-generated metaphor for the entire semester as they study the material. The metaphor exercise is risk-free for the participants because there are no right or wrong answers. It can provide them with a mental structure on which to "hang" various concepts. And you might discover some new ways to look at your material.



To administer the questionnaire, you could have persons complete it individually and then divide into small groups and reach a group consensus. Or you could start with the small groups, and have them complete the questionnaire as a group. The responses (not the "because" statements) are posted on a grid on the board (groups across the top, metaphor names down the left side). The class is asked to collectively look for patterns within groups or their individual responses to see if a pattern emerges. It is important for the class to generate the meaning because the same symbol may convey something different to different groups. Luechauer and Shulman do not ask students to report on the "because" statements as they feel these may be contaminated by conscious desires. (However, when I have used this technique, my students seemed to want to state their reasons.)

## *Metaphor Exercise Handout Overview:*

A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that is ordinarily used for one thing and is applied to designate something else. An implicit comparison is made between the two. They provide a means to make complex phenomenon more easily understandable. They also carry a great deal of hidden meaning and significance because the metaphors we use to describe something say much about how we think and feel about that thing. This activity is designed to help you come to understand some of the things you think and feel about this topic.

If this concept were an animal it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

If this concept were a food it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

If this concept were a place it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

If this concept were a TV show/movie it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.  
If this concept were a season it would be \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) How easy was it for you to reach group consensus regarding these metaphors? What does that imply about the culture of your group?
- 2) What are some "concrete" behavioral/attitudinal things your group does to exemplify these metaphors? That is, how do you see these metaphors in "action"?

## Some Thoughts . . .

by Pat Trutty-Coohill, Art

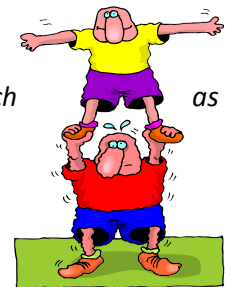
To the question concerning how to create an atmosphere for a class, Dr. Trutty-Coohill answered, "I give a very good, easily accessible, general lecture." As to the question about ice breakers, Trutty-Coohill responded that she used the "Socratic lecture" to provide interaction with "easy questions to provoke thought." To the question about how you feel about keeping the students the entire period the first day, she responded, "Great. They're fresh and curious."

## Name Tags & Teams

by Pat Minors, Health Care Administration

I combine two aspects of my course in an activity I use on the first day of class: the establishment of the need to learn a series of important observations for critical names and the placement of students into teams of two to work together during the semester. I accomplish both by creating name tags with abbreviations and name tags with the complete names for the chosen terms, such as A.H.A. for American Hospital Association. One tag, with either an abbreviation or a complete name, is distributed to each student. They must then find their mate! The person with the A.H.A. tag must locate the person with American Hospital Association tag. Students become familiar with each other and with a number of abbreviations and their corresponding names by searching for their own matches!

*Editor's Note: This idea translates into various disciplines, such as an English class in which groups were needed. For example: one tag might identify a figure of speech, such as metaphor, complete with a definition if needed, and the matching tag or tags would contain examples of metaphor. Create a group of as many members as desired by the number of tags with examples.*



# Informational Cards

by Alton Little, Kinesiology, Recreation, and Sport

While covering the usual instructional and administrative obligations demanded by the first day--procedures, policies, and syllabus--I use an information gathering system to learn about the student myself as well as introduce him or her to the class.

Each student is asked to fill out a 3 x 5 index card with the following information: name, local address, phone number, major, recreation experience, any certification, and talents. Then, I ask them to list in a maximum of two lines--so that they will have room to ponder and edit--their life's expectations or what they want to accomplish during their lifetime.



After taking up the cards, I use them to interact with the students. Students introduce themselves individually to the class and provide information about themselves. I allow class members to ask questions of each of the students as well. Such things as same home locations and common interests allow students to become familiar with each other. They may find someone who lives near them on campus to study with, share notes with, or find a ride home with.

Valuable beyond establishing the atmosphere I desire on the first day, the information revealed on the cards helps me later with such things as having an opening topic if I need to confer with a student during the semester or having accurate information if I need to contact a student during inclement weather.

# Biographical Essays

by Lloyd Davies, English

Since my classes all stress writing in some way, on the first day I have students interview each other and take notes. They ascertain biographical data, school interests, future plans and similar information. I then ask them to take notes and write a short, well-organized biographical sketch of the person they interviewed. After they have done so, they introduce each other to me and the rest of the class by reading the papers they have written.



This activity serves several purposes. Members of the class get to interact somewhat informally, while I learn something about each student. In addition, and related to the goals of the class, I immediately have a first writing sample from each student, which gives me a good initial sense of the quality of their writing.

# Establishing the Class Tone

by Conrad Moore, Geography and Geology

My view of the first day of class is conventional. I summarize the subject matter that we will be discussing in detail over the course of the semester and illustrate how the material is important for students and mature adults as well. This may or may not be directly related to students' goals. In upper division courses, it usually is. For the majority of students in lower division general education courses, it probably is not. Nevertheless, it is important in the context of becoming an educated person (the rationale for the general education requirement), and it may have considerable significance with respect to secondary elements in an individual's life, such as a later decision to relocate in another region of the United States or a foreign country. For example, in Geography 100, Introduction to the Physical Environment, I point out that this deals with all aspects of the natural environment. An understanding of geology and terrain, weather patterns, climate conditions, natural vegetation and soil characteristics may save a person from making an uninformed decision to relocate in another part of the country which he or she subsequently may come to regret.

While there is always room for humor and perhaps even games in a course, education is a very serious business, and my approach on the first day of class conforms to that fact.

# Transparency Teams

by Jacqueline M. Schliefer, Business Education

The information that follows is from a transparency I use on the first day of classes. I find it more interesting (to let the students work through this activity) than repeating the same boring information about my background and "credentials."

Form groups of four or five and decide what questions you want to ask me about:

- My Background
- My Experience
- My Interests
- My Present Activities
- The Course
- Its Content
- Tests
- Requirements
- Etc.



Please ask any questions that you feel are important to you and your group.

# An Unconventional Beginning

by Carol R. Graham, Management

Since I am a radical teacher, the first days of class are of critical importance in having students buy into a nontraditional way of learning and in establishing the learning climate for the course. On the first day of class, I ask for and discuss students' expectations of me and the course. Then I explain what I expect from them: active participation and development of a sense of responsibility for their own learning. I tell them how hard they will have to work and encourage them to drop the course if they are not willing to work hard. Since my methods follow from my philosophy of teaching/learning, I lead them through the three main parts:

- a) Minds are not blank slates--few lectures; heterogeneous groups; many application exercises; purposeful mistakes for students to catch.
- b) Knowledge is uncertain--more to learning than memorization of ideas and facts; recognition of uncertainty and ambiguity; selecting preferences despite uncertainty; learning to tie analyses to values
- c) Learning is social--teacher and students learn names of all students; group work outside class; individual student voices heard; teacher fallible.



I talk a LOT this first day; students listen and are very quiet. They write information about themselves on index cards that I use to separate students into heterogeneous groups. I give away a textbook by drawing an index card from the stack--the winner has special responsibilities during the semester. A written assignment, usually an essay, is given; this assignment is due the third day of class. OF COURSE, I keep the students the entire period the first day--staying the whole time and giving a written assignment helps establish the value of the class to me and to them.

The second day of class is spent in meaningful activity:

1. I assign students to groups (usually six groups of seven students)
2. Group pictures are taken to facilitate each person learning the first and last names of each class member (a names test two weeks into the semester results in the only "bonus points" given)
3. Groups decide (consensus, not majority vote, so they begin to talk to each other and give reasons for their opinions) how to weight their grades among individual, group, and peer evaluation categories (within certain parameters given by me), and then groups' representatives decide what the grade weights will be for the class
4. Members within groups get to know each other, exchange phone numbers, etc. The ice has been broken--students are talking and listening to each other and, gradually, they learn that I listen when they talk to me.



# NOTES

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