

# The first day of class

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A checklist of the content recommended for the first day of class in a new semester. The checklist is appropriate for both classroom and online courses.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Use the checklist to plan your lesson plan for the first day of class. Alternatively, review your existing lesson plan using the checklist as a guide to identify items that you may wish to add to the class. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

Introducing a course with video means creating a “welcome video” in which the instructor appears on camera addressing students. Videos do not need to be professionally produced or even edited. A welcome video is usually uploaded to the course under the course orientation/introduction module, and is accessible by all students in a course shortly before the course starts

### Preparation

* **Self**: Particularly if the course you are teaching is new or not one you created, familiarize yourself with the course syllabus and materials in order to demonstrate confidence to students when directly answering course-related questions.
* **Tech and Materials**: Practice with and test classroom facilities and technology ahead of time, make sure projected materials and board work will be visible, and have needed materials out and ready before the start of class. Contact USC Learning Environments to receive training on using the technology in your physical classroom and for assistance with classroom facilities.
* **Room**: Arrive to the classroom early, or visit beforehand, to decide how to best arrange the furniture if it can be moved (podium, desk position, student desks in groups or circle, etc.) For online courses, also login early or beforehand and decide which features to use and how to best arrange the camera view, chat boxes, breakout rooms, etc.

### Introductions

* **Self**: Welcome and greet students, referring to the name of the course written on the board or projected. Briefly share your educational background, passion for the subject, professional activities, and something personal, such as a hobby, that can help students see you as a whole and relatable person.
* **TAs:** Have any TAs introduce themselves and explain their roles in the course for sections/labs.
* **Students**: For small classes, quickly have students share their names and goals/interests in the course topic. For large classes, consider having students each complete an index card or Blackboard post with introductory information for you or introduce themselves to the classmates next to them.
* **Course**: Give students a sense of how the course fits into their overall educational experience, post-graduation life, and eventual careers, as well as your personal aspirations for why you think they should want to learn the course material, and advice on how to best succeed in the course. Mention any prerequisites.

### Syllabus

* **Learning Objectives**: Communicate that learning objectives outline what students should be able to do by the end of the course and form the backbone of the course to which all assignments/assessments are tied.
* **Texts**: Identify the required texts students will need to purchase.
* **Assignments/Assessments**: Reinforce how each major assignment/assessment is tied to the course learning objectives, estimates of workload, and how/when/where students will receive information on assignment details (due dates, descriptions, prompts, requirements, grading rubrics, etc.)
* **Policies**: Highlight policies unique to your department, program, or course (such as an in-class technology policy, acceptance of late work policy, or safety protocols) to differentiate them from university-wide policies. Explain university policies (such as academic integrity or emergency procedures) that might be unfamiliar to certain populations like international students.

### Communication

* **Response**: Invite communication, explain how students should contact you, and provide your timeline for responding (such as within 48 hours by email, office hours).
* **Q&A**: Allow time for answering student questions about the course.
* **Private/Confidential Matters**: Request students meet with you individually outside of class to discuss special situations and university-approved accommodations.
* **Office Hours**: Announce and hold an office hour as soon as possible after the first class meeting to address private student questions and issues.

### Structure

* **Environment**: Convey a culture and set a tone of mutual respect as responsible adults rather than taking the role of disciplinarian. Refer to applicable topics like attendance, participation, safety, preparation, diverse opinions, and risk-taking.
* **Techniques**: Describe the structure of a typical class, techniques used (such as active learning, problem- or case-based learning, or flipped classroom), and reasons for using those techniques.
* **Activity Practice**: Help students build a sense of community and get accustomed to recurring activity structures and course technology by practicing with a simple introductory Blackboard post or group activity related to the first day’s content or students’ prior knowledge of the course topics.

### Content

* **Collected Information**: If time permits, give a brief diagnostic test or survey, or ask students to work through and submit a problem or a question they hope to answer by taking the course.
* **Provided Information**: Introduce course content from the first topic or unit.
* **Homework**: Remind students of the next assignment due.
* **Wrap-up**: End class on-time, having saved the last few minutes for review, reminders, and preview of the next class. If desired, collect a short response from students reflecting on the first class session, questions, or concerns.

**Reference**: Davis, B. G. (2009). Tools for teaching. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.