

## How To Series

“Co-Creation of Value”

Revised July 2013

## First Day of Class

### Preparing Your Course

Key to the first day of class and for that matter, the course itself, is the time and effort that must come before the course is offered. Several steps can be followed to make sure you have laid out the path of your course for your students as well as for yourself.

1. Designing a new course: Designing a new course requires significant time and effort prior to the first class. Students appreciate a well-organized course.
2. Rethinking a previous course: It is important to attempt to continuously improve the course. A full redesign or tweaking based on previous experience from past semesters as well as adding new knowledge and pedagogy are keys to successful change.
3. Preparing a readable and comprehensive syllabus that spells out direction for the course and provides expectations of shared responsibility. Students need to know what their responsibilities are (e.g., preparing for class, participating), as well as those of the instructor (e.g., preparing engaging use of class time, being responsive to student needs).

Please refer to our website for more information and a syllabus template:  
<http://tenntlc.utk.edu/creating-a-syllabus/>

The TennTLC offers consultation for each of these three steps.



### First Day and the Theatrical Play Metaphor

One can think of a course as a theatrical play and each session as an act where both instructor and students serve as directors and actors. The course typically has many “acts”. On the first day, the instructor takes the role of the director, and both students and instructor are “players”. In staging an act of the play, the director (instructor) must consider the objective or outcome (i.e., where you want to end up) and the plot (i.e., how do you propose to get there). Aspects of the “play” include content and roles, but may also involve space, movement, interaction, and timing.

The “first act” (first day of class) sets the tone of the play. Students, as “actors”, come into a course both curious and anxious, uncertain of what is to come. They are often silently asking “What will I get out of this course (play)?” “How will this course (play) help me in my future?” “Will I like the instructor (director/actor)?” “Will I enjoy the other students (actors)?” The opening act (first day) introduces the “play” (class) and four key elements are necessary for success.

- A. Establishing rapport with the students
- B. Being the motivational force
- C. Hooking the students (into the course content)
- D. Providing the direction and expectations for the course

Each of these elements are considered on the next page.

## A Establishing Rapport with Students

Establishing positive rapport with your students is critical to a successful first day (as well as for the course as a whole). Two actions are important in developing rapport.

- First, begin to put names with faces. If you have access to the Blackboard Roster, spend some time before the first day learning names and faces. Saying hello to someone by name is surprising, yet effective. In a class of less than 50, spending the first few classes to memorize names and faces is well worth the investment.
- Second, make sure you arrive early (15 minutes before class), quickly set up any technology you need, and then start introducing yourself to individual and small groups of students. Shake their hands and initiate informal conversation. Ask them where they are from, what they are majoring in if not a major course. This is important to do on a regular basis but critical the first few sessions of a course.

## C “Hooking” the Students into the Course

Do something the very first day to “hook” your class into the topic. Do it before you present the syllabus. This is part of being the MOTIVATIONAL FORCE in the classroom.

Start the class with an experiential exercise that gets the students conversing with each other. Make it intriguing, for example, a small puzzle to solve that involves course content, or a fascinating demonstration of some sort with a follow-up discussion. Make it interactive (e.g., having students work in small groups of 3-4 and have a few report what they discussed. Leave them “wanting more.”

## B Being the Motivational Force in the Classroom

As noted on the first page, students are both curious and anxious with the start of a new class. They seek their motivation from their instructor, especially in the beginning of the course. So the instructor must be willing to be the MOTIVATIONAL FORCE in the classroom. If you are not willing to take this role in the “play”, you might want to ask yourself why you are teaching. Students draw energy from the instructor and it influences the affective side of their brains. There are two important elements behind being the MOTIVATIONAL FORCE:

- Enthusiasm – expressed through non-verbal behaviors, expressiveness, excitement in one’s voice, and interest in interaction with one’s students.
- Passion – expressed through the sharing of one’s love for their topic. Start each day talking about why this topic is important to you as a chemist, a psychologist, a historian, a political scientist, etc. Passion is extremely contagious and your students will get the bug for the content.

## D Providing Direction and Expectations

Building off of the experiential exercise, start by taking students on a journey through your class. Where does the journey end (course objectives and outcomes) and how are we going to get there? Consider the flow of this journey description. What are the key elements of the journey? How does learning occur in this course?

Thoroughly discuss the notion of shared responsibility with your students. What is expected of them (e.g., preparation, appropriate behaviors) and what do you expect of yourself (creating exercises that applies what they prepare and makes it relevant to them).

Go over performance indicators last, but in detail (i.e., tests, assignments, grading, etc.) End on a note of encouragement.