



# Beginning a Class

## Skills for Successful Teachers

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Students are most likely to remember the first and last things you do in a lesson. Indeed, many believe the first three minutes of a class are the most important. An effective opening can serve several valuable purposes. It can focus students' attention on what they are about to learn. An effective opening can also arouse students' curiosity and interest in the lesson. It helps motivate them to become involved in the lesson. The beginning sets the tone for the rest of the lesson. It creates psychological readiness to engage in learning. The opening of the lesson stimulates your students' emotions, such as puzzlement, curiosity, tension, empathy, wonderment, excitement, amusement, pride, skepticism, or fascination. Remember that students of all ages approach any lesson with the question, "What's in it for me?" If your opening addresses that question you will have a motivated learner.

- Learning begins before the bell rings. Use posters, door signs, music, transparencies and other techniques to engage the students' minds, capture their attention, and arouse anticipation before the class officially begins. Many teachers have music playing as students enter to set the appropriate mood. Attention getters, such as trivia and interesting facts related to the day's topic might be suspended from the ceiling, hung upside down, or otherwise interestingly displayed to grab students' attention.

- Be sure you have everyone's attention before you begin. Don't try to talk over the group noise. Convey enthusiasm for what the lesson. It can be contagious. If you don't sound very interested in what you are teaching it is improbable your students will be. Be especially cognizant of maintaining eye contact with your students during the opening. Scan the entire class to include everyone.

- The opening must be connected to the main lesson. Your students must be able to see that the opening is relevant to the rest of the lesson.

- Avoid beginning the class with routine, procedural tasks (taking attendance, collecting homework, general announcements, etc.). Remember, your students most remember the first and last things that happen in the class. Later, while students are working individually or in small groups you can unobtrusively take attendance. Get your lessons off to a good start; give them punch.

- It is essential to get your students actively involved within the first two minutes of the lesson. There are many way this might be accomplished, and it need not take a big chunk of time; a three or four second response actively draws their attention to the lesson. Here are several strategies successfully used by effective teachers to engage their students in the lesson:

- Begin with a personal anecdote. A personal illustration which ties to the topic makes it more personal and interesting. Remember, it must be relevant to the lesson you are teaching.

- Pose a challenging question. Give careful thought to your opening questions. You may have students respond by jotting down their answer, volunteering to share it aloud, or simply answer silently to themselves. It is often helpful to ask a question to which everyone is likely to raise their hands (e.g., "How many are ready for a vacation?").

- Present a startling statistic or fact about some aspect of the lesson.

- Open the class with an unusual, surprising behavior or event.

- Present an interesting, relevant problem.
- Start with a funny story. It can be a true incident or a fictional tale. It is even better if it is something that really happened to you. Don't try for jokes. Most importantly the story must pertain the day's topic.
- Use a true/false quiz reflecting major issues or research related to the topic. Before you give them the right answers devise ways for them to share their "guesses" as to the correct answer. You might tabulate their responses on the board, or move their bodies to different spots on a "live" continuum to indicate how sure they are of each answer.
- Display interesting visuals: a cartoon, poster, or quotation. In groups or as a whole class, you might have them discuss their reaction to the visual.
- Use a prop--an unusual piece of equipment, artifact, collection, toy or creature. Use a gimmick to grab your students' attention. Walk into class with a portable telephone. Carry on a conversation over the phone in which you introduce the day's topic. Add humor or a personal anecdote. Use your imagination.
- Use drama to let students introduce the issue or problem which will be the focus of the day's lesson.
- Experiment with using costumes or hats related to the topic being introduced. Pull off a shirt to reveal a tee-shirt depicting a quotation or graphic related to the lesson.
- Make a promise (By the end of this lesson you will be able to....").
- Draw analogies between what has been learned previously and the new skills or content being learned in the current lesson.
- Use a magic trick. There are many good books suggesting simple tricks you can easily master. Or visit a magic shop looking for gimmicks or tricks which might fit into one of your lessons. Your banter during the trick is what ties it into your lesson. Don't let it just hang by itself.
- It is a sound practice to frequently build in some form of review of the previous lesson at the beginning of a lesson. However, to be effective strive to make the review segment interesting and active. Mind-maps, analogies, brainstorming, role playing, or a cooperative learning activity will generally be more effective than just telling the students what was studied previously.
- To maximize their impact vary your openings. Strive to be creative and occasionally use the element of surprise. If your openings become the best part of the lesson you have much less problem with tardiness!

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