



Make Day 1 About the Students

The first day of school should be all about the students. We need to learn their names as fast as possible. The sooner we know their names, the more we care about them. That's what they're thinking. I promise. Referring to your seating chart will help you learn the names the quickest. My seating chart is virtually attached to my hands the first few weeks of school, until I learn all of the student names. Make sure the seating chart is always on a clipboard you walk around the classroom with. The students don't really know what is on your clipboard, so the fact that you are addressing them by name will be impressive to them. Other adults in your room should have a copy of the seating chart too, so they know names as well.

In the first two days, you may not have a seating chart yet, and students may still be enrolling in the school or your class. However, you can still start learning student names in a few creative ways.

Tips for Learning Students' Names

Learning Students' Names Method #1 (Basic): If you're a little hesitant and would rather take a conservative approach to learning names, that's fine. My mentor taught me an effortless trick: Just have the students take an index card and fold it in half on their desks. Have them write their first name as large as possible on half the card, and display the name facing you. They keep the cards and put them up as soon as they get into your class. This will work for

the first few days. Then, make a seating chart as soon as possible to get a handle on the names fast. You could also use name tags, but index cards are reusable and easier on your wallet. Most schools provide index cards to teachers at the beginning of the school year.

Learning Students' Names Method #2: Use student pictures. Most attendance programs now will make seating charts with student pictures on them. If you don't want to take the time to construct one, you can either cut and paste the student pictures on your seating chart, or keep a reference of student pictures on your clipboard, behind your seating chart.

Learning Students' Names Method #3 (Advanced): I read this in W. Michael Kelley's *Rookie Teaching for Dummies* (2003) and use it every year. Don't let the title deter you; I read that book in my fifth year of teaching and used many new ideas I found. I started using this technique in Year 5, only because I had never heard of it before. I would caution newer teachers against using it if it's your first year in the classroom. The students get a kick out of it, and it's really effective for learning names. It also shows the students that you are creative, and they may never know what to expect.

1. Start at one edge of your classroom and ask the student her first name.
2. Move on to the student behind her.
3. Go back and forth a few times between the two of them, repeating their names as you look into their faces.
4. Move on to a third student, repeat the name, and review all the names you've learned so far.
5. Repeat this process until you learn the entire class, and then spend some time picking out students at random and trying to remember their names.
6. When you feel comfortable with the names, turn your back, and ask the students to change desks.

Source: Kelley, W. M. (2003). *Rookie Teaching for Dummies*. New York, NY: Wiley Publishing, Inc. Copyright © 2003 by Wiley Publishing, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana. www.wiley.com No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act.

My goal was always to find out about my students on the first day (make it about them). Show them you care who they are as learners. I like to do an activity to get them talking to each other and problem solving. Remember, they are as scared as you are. They want to know about you, but they also want to know each other. You will need your class to be friendly with each other to have a productive year, so it pays off if they can learn to communicate

with a bit of structure to enjoy speaking with and learning from each other. This is why structured team-building or icebreaker activities are priceless on this day.

On the first day you want your students to smile, be able to communicate with each other, and start raising hands. Save the rest for later. The icebreaker activities I enjoyed the most required students to be up and out of their seats, around the room, and trying to solve a puzzle in a group or team. There are tons of these activities online, in books, or in the minds of your colleagues. A book I recommend for icebreakers and team-building activities that can carry throughout the year is *Thiagi's 100 Favorite Games* (Thiagarajan, 2006). This book is filled with team-building and icebreaker activities for learners, from grade-school age up to adult, to help build a community of leaders and critical thinkers in your classroom. My copy lives on the bookshelf beside my desk.

Figure 1.1 shows the traditional way of doing Day 1, as well as better way that will engage your students.

In Best Practice #5, you'll see why having students speak to one another on Day 1 will help you build a seating chart the first week. You have to see a glimpse of their personalities. Day 2 is when they can begin to take notes, learn the classroom rules, understand your expectations and consequences, and get ready to learn. Day 1 shows them you are curious about *them*, and you want to hear *their* voices and learn *their* names.

Figure 1.1 Engaging Your Students on Day 1

OLD WAY OF DOING DAY 1	FRESH AND ENGAGING IDEAS FOR DAY 1
Teacher goes over class rules and expectations.	Students do a collaborative icebreaker or structured collaborative activity. Teacher saves rules and expectations for Day 2
Students leave with an idea of the teacher's personality.	Teacher is more interested in seeing the personalities of the students.
Students do not know their classmates and may be resistant to collaborate the next day.	Students start to know their classmates and collaboration is easier the next day.
Student voice is not heard.	Student voice is heard.
Students leave the room understanding rules and expectations.	Students leave the room smiling and excited for the next day of class. Teacher goes over rules and expectations on Day 2.

Your turn

1. What is one of your favorite icebreaker activities? Why do you like it so much?

2. What message does doing a team-building or icebreaker activity on Day 1 relay to your students?

3. Why is it important to have students talking to each other on Day 1 in a structured activity? How will this facilitate student collaboration in your classroom?

4. Think about a successful icebreaker you've done in the past. What were some of the long-term positive results that came out of doing that icebreaker?
