

is aimed mostly at K-12 teachers. Still, the language of writing learning objectives will cross the boundaries into syllabus construction, so it might be worth a look.

Lang, James. "The Promising Syllabus." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53.2 (September 1, 2006): C2.

This column on the syllabus includes additional thoughts from Ken Bain on the promising syllabus, which came from an interview I conducted with him on the topic.

Sorcinelli, Mary Deane, and Peter Elbow, eds. *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines. New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 69 (Spring 1997).

This issue of *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* contains a dozen essays on the use of writing in the college classroom, all of which are grounded firmly in research on writing and learning. It's an excellent starting point if you are interested in pursuing that research further, and it also describes some great practical strategies.

First Days of Class

I walked into my very first college course as a teacher three weeks before my twenty-second birthday, in late August of 1991, the first week of my first year of graduate school. It was English composition, 8:30 A.M., and I had seven students enrolled. Concerned about the fact that I was probably only three years older than the students I would find in the class, I decided to forget about trying to impress them with my authority, and to try instead to seem like one of them—so I was wearing sandals, a pair of navy-blue khakis that I had cut raggedly into shorts, and a white T-shirt. I was nervous, so I kept it short. I gave them the syllabus and the first assignment sheet for the course, read through both documents, and then let the students go.

I'm willing to shoulder only part of the blame for all of the bad decisions I've just described (if you think you can identify all of them, put your name and address on a postcard, send it to me, and you'll be eligible for a drawing for a free lunch). Like the other new graduate student instructors that year, I had spent a day or two at a teaching orientation sponsored by the university, and I was enrolled in a graduate course called "Teaching Writing" that would meet weekly throughout the semester (though it hadn't met yet). Despite these kindly (but flimsy) efforts by the

university, I was massively underprepared for a very complex task—helping eighteen-year-old students learn to read, think, and write well enough to prepare them for success in college and life beyond.

My lack-of-training story is a familiar one in academic autobiographies, as Elaine Showalter points out in *Teaching Literature* (4–9), common to most of us who have been teaching for a half-dozen to a dozen years or more now. But times have changed, and few teachers will enter their first classroom with such a tiny amount of advance help and advice. Your commitment to reading this book, if you do nothing else, still puts you ahead of where I was on that first day. But more likely than not, you have already taken a graduate course on teaching, or you have spent time serving as a teaching assistant, or you have been through a more extensive orientation or training program than the one I experienced.

However much of this you have under your belt, I can promise you this: you will be nervous, and you will be glad when that first class is over. That's not necessarily a bad thing—nervousness produces an energy that you can channel into your opening day presentation, and no nerves whatsoever would probably mean that you aren't taking the job seriously enough. Showalter cites a colleague who offers an excellent description of this dynamic: "Of course you are scared of going into a classroom and performing in public. Who isn't? But that's where your energy will come from. Reinterpret your reluctance to perform as a desire to perform" (17). So accept the fact that you will be nervous, prepare for it if nerves produce physical symptoms for you—for instance, have a bottle of water for dehydration, or a handkerchief for sweaty palms—and rest assured that once you get into the room, that first class will fly by.

But while you're eagerly anticipating that opening day, you need to consider a handful of issues, and plan your course of action for that first day. I'll address below a few decisions you'll need to make before you step into the classroom, and then consider your pedagogical options for the first day of the semester.

What (Not) to Wear

Let's begin very specifically: don't wear navy-blue khaki cutoffs, sandals, and a white T-shirt. Moving to a more general level, don't wear the kinds of casual or unkempt outfits that you believe the students will think are cool, for two main reasons: you're not a student, and in any case you're probably wrong about what the students will think is cool.

The question of the kind of relationship you want to forge with your students, and what kind of teaching persona you want to construct, is a complex one. I will address it more fully in Chapter 15. But I will anticipate the ending here and say that the one relationship you should not imagine yourself having with your students is that of a friend or peer. However close you are to your student days yourself, you are now in a position of authority over the students in your class. You should certainly want them to feel comfortable with you, and to speak to you openly and honestly about their ideas and their lives, but keep in mind that you have control over their grades, and those grades, rightly or wrongly, can impact their lives in all kinds of significant ways—determining whether or not they maintain scholarships, are accepted into graduate or professional schools, and are offered the jobs they want. Trying to assume the role of a friend in their lives—either by your dress, or your interactions with them outside of the classroom, or your correspondence with them—is a disingenu-

ous pose that obfuscates the nature of the real authority you have in their academic lives.

So, what should you wear? Styles change, and I don't follow fashion trends very closely, so I won't be too specific here. But wear attire that seems professional, and that helps to establish a boundary between you and the students (who will all mostly be wearing shorts, jeans, and various articles from Abercrombie and Fitch). Men will always be safe wearing long pants and a shirt with a collar; women can of course be safe wearing the same thing, though women will have more varied options for boundary-establishing dress. A great resource for the more complicated world of women's fashion in higher education is Emily Toth's *Ms. Mentor* guide, listed in the reference section of this chapter (you can also find some of her fashion advice online in the free archives of her column for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*).

But don't obsess about it. If you're really flummoxed about what to wear, then throw on the outfit you wore when you interviewed for the teaching position you now have, and for the first day or two of classes just see what everyone else is wearing.

Follow suit.

Free Day or Full Day?

Mistake number two, on my legendary opening day, was doing twenty minutes of syllabus reading and letting the students go early. Unfortunately, you will find that some of your colleagues treat the first day of class as a half-day, the only purpose of which is to pass out the syllabus and take questions (and there are almost never any questions). I see little harm in making a slight concession to this custom, and letting the class out five or ten or fifteen minutes early (depending upon the length of the ses-

sion), but to offer no substantive pedagogy on the first day of the course is a mistake.

Much of what we do in the classroom has symbolic value on top of whatever face value it might have. So lecturing for an entire semester without allowing students any opportunity to speak sends the message that you have no interest in what they have to say; dressing in khaki cutoffs sends (or tries to send) the message that you're no different from the students; leaving your cell phone in view on your desk during class signals that cell phones are acceptable in class.

Opening the semester by introducing the students to the course topic or material in a substantive way sends the message that you are excited and eager to help the students learn in this course, and that the time they invest in coming to class matters. Not engaging with the course topic or material on the first day, by contrast, sends a message that the course meetings are a requirement that you both would rather not fulfill: you'll meet when you have to, but at every opportunity to cut things short (first and last days, or days before a break), you're as eager to avoid seeing them as they are to avoid seeing you.

Engaging with the course material on the first day does not mean delivering a full lecture—that seems to me as poor an idea as ending class early. Indeed, a research study by Perlman and McCann on teaching strategies that were most and least effective on the first day of class, published in the journal *Teaching of Psychology*, suggests that delivering a full session's worth of information on the first day proved counterproductive for many students, and turned them off to the course (278). Remember that students are usually beginning five new courses this first week, so offering too much information on that first day may prove a waste of time, since the students may be too overwhelmed to absorb it. Still, even within the limits of a (slightly) shortened class,

you can easily make use of a few simple but substantive teaching techniques to introduce the course, pique the students' interest, and start the semester off right.

Adding and Dropping

Experienced faculty might reject the argument above for a reason that you will quickly become familiar with yourself—namely, that the first week of classes at most colleges and universities is add/drop week, meaning that students have the opportunity to make changes to their schedule through the first week of the semester, adding courses that might have opened up over break and dropping courses that no longer fit in their schedule. Some schools have developed a culture which views the first week almost as an opportunity for students to window-shop in various courses, visiting multiple classes which might be competing for the same slot in their schedule, and eventually picking the one with the best professor, or the right workload, or even just the most convenient times and days. Since a sizable percentage of students who attend the first day might not be here in a week, faculty members might wonder, why spend a lot of time planning for that first day?

Add/drop week is a necessary evil, since students will always have to deal with possible last-minute schedule changes in extracurricular activities, work commitments outside of school, internships, or other obligations. But reducing the first day of the semester to the equivalent of sticking your syllabus in the shop window, hoping to attract customers, helps to make this necessary evil into a regular feature of the campus culture. Although it may seem to stretch on endlessly to you now, the fifteen weeks of the semester will fly by, and you'll find yourself struggling to

accomplish all of the objectives you set for yourself in your syllabus. Don't sacrifice course time lightly; make the first day an important part of your course.

What should you do about adding and dropping students? You don't have to do anything about students who drop, of course, except be grateful about the fact that you now have one less set of exams or papers to grade this semester.

Adding students presents a bit more of a challenge. In every class that follows the first one in add/drop week, make a quick announcement at the beginning of class that students who did not attend on the first day should stop and see you after the class. Hand them a syllabus, ask them to review it and e-mail questions to you or bring them to the next class, and—most important—explain that they bear the full responsibility for material or assignments that were covered on days they have missed. If they can get that information from a fellow student, fine; if not, point out your office hours and ask them to come and see you so that you can review for them what they have missed. Because you will be sure to have a student or two in this situation, you might consider making your opening-day lecture or exercise available in paper form, or posting it to the course website, so that you can save yourself some time that first week by sending them away from their visit to your office with a handout or worksheet or a website address.

What to Do: Teaching the First Class

Whatever you decide to do on the first day, you should ensure that you cover three bases: present the syllabus to the students; introduce the course topic and/or some initial material; and require at least some students to participate.

This last point may be the most important one. Determining how students can participate in the course, and can make their voices heard in and outside of the classroom, should factor into every decision you make in your pedagogy, including decisions you make about the first day of the semester.

Symbolism plays a role here as well. Inviting—and perhaps requiring—students to participate in the first class of the semester sends the signal that students in this course will not be able to sit back and coast through the semester. They are expected to be in class, to be prepared, and to participate in every session. Here are a few specific techniques that can help you accomplish these objectives for your first day of the semester.

SYLLABUS REVIEW

For most classes I have taught, this part of the first day has consisted of my standing in front of the classroom and reading the syllabus aloud, which I have traditionally done for two reasons. The first one might be construed as vaguely legalistic: I want to be sure that everyone has heard the student responsibilities in the course and the policies on academic honesty, so that when I have to deal with problems in these areas, no student can claim ignorance of them. The second reason is that the reading-aloud exercise allows me to elaborate on various aspects of the syllabus that are worth noting, and might be skipped over if the students are just skimming through it to check for the workload and due dates.

Reading the syllabus aloud will certainly suffice to introduce them to the course, and I don't see anything wrong with it—as long as you are engaging the students more actively during some other segment of that first day. But, truth be told, both you and they will probably find it among the most boring moments of the

semester; imagine if your department chair gave you the faculty policy document, and then sat across from you at a table and read it out loud to you. How boring and annoying would that be?

When I wrote a column for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in the fall of 2006 about the boredom of the syllabus read-aloud, I received many e-mails from faculty members who had devised more interesting ways of introducing the students to the syllabus. The best idea came from Michael Gennert, a computer scientist who described his opening class in this way:

I usually hand out a course description sheet that includes what the course covers, the required background, instructor and TA office hours, labs, homework and project expectations, exam dates, grading policy, and honesty policy.

Then I tell students to find a partner—and wait for them to do so, because someone is going to want to be a loner—and ask them to work together to find 3 questions they want to know about the course that aren't on the sheet. Then I ask for, and try to answer, their questions. (Lang, C1)

The benefits, Gennert explains, are multiple: “They’re awake, working collaboratively, taking responsibility for asking something, talking to each other and me, and engaged.” All these qualities, of course, are ones you want to see in students throughout the semester, and Gennert’s technique does an excellent job, it seems to me, of establishing the culture of participation that you should work for in your course, and begin with on your first day.

I would suggest only one small modification to this technique—namely, that the students can ask three questions either about what’s not on the syllabus, or about what *is* on the syllabus. Although we might imagine our syllabus prose to be crystal-

clear and in no need of elaboration or explanation, our students might not see it the same way.

ICE-BREAKERS

You've probably participated in ice-breakers at some point in your life—activities at the beginning of a group meeting or process which are designed to help the participants get to know one another, and feel comfortable with the group. This is an admirable goal, and certainly one you'll want to achieve somehow in your course, but I'll be honest here and advise that ice-breakers which are not tightly tied to the content of the course should be avoided, for two reasons: they can remind students of the kinds of activities that they hoped they left behind in their grade-school and high-school classrooms; and the students are being ice-brokeered to death, I can assure you, in the orientations they are undergoing in the other parts of their campus lives—for the freshman class, for their dorms or floors, for their clubs and teams, and so on.

If you're really an ice-breaker kind of person, and you participated in an ice-breaker that changed your life and you have a missionary zeal to pass it on to others, go with it. I agree with Graham Bennett, who criticizes ice-breaking activities with the point that "our students are all very different, and for every student who revels in funky, creative edutainment, there is a student who is totally put off by anything resembling a game or gimmick" (Bennett, C2)—but his point also means that you'll have students who "revel" in ice-breakers (i.e., weirdos), and you won't please everyone no matter what you do. So if you're an ice-breaking type, ice-break away. On that note, in looking around for the least offensive ice-breaking activities I could find for this chapter, I came across two simple ways to get to know students informally that Donna Killian Duffy and Janet Wright Jones rec-

ommend, and that seemed quick and sufficiently removed from the summer-camp nature of many ice-breakers:

1. Arrive at the first class well before the starting time, and stand at the doorway and greet each student as they come in, shaking hands and introducing yourself to them by name; this can both help you learn names right away, and, as Duffy and Jones put it, "fosters a feeling of community" (141).
2. As students come into class, hand each one a piece of chalk and ask them to write their names on the board before they sit down; benefits here include again greeting each student individually, and the students "begin to share in the ownership of the classroom space" (141), which might help encourage greater participation down the line.

If neither of these activities appeal to you, and you don't like the idea of ice-breaking activities or such informal openings, try one of the more conventionally academic alternatives given below.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Research on learning theory suggests that students come into our classes with some prior "knowledge" of our subject matter, and they use what they already know to help them organize the information and ideas that you present to them (see Chapter 7 for more on this). I say "knowledge" because, as you may see it, what they have is not knowledge but misconceptions, stereotypes, and half-formed ideas or scattered bits of information. No matter—whatever they have, they will use it to help them process the information you give them, and they will attempt to fit new information into the categories their prior information has helped them to construct.

But my students, you might object, have no prior knowledge about the culture of Native American societies in the pre-Columbian era. Perhaps not, but they have ideas about Native Americans, and about pre-Columbian America—smatterings and bits of data picked up from other courses, from television and movies, or from their own reading. Those ideas—preconceptions about Native Americans, for example—will act as filters to help them process what they read and hear in your course. If their only perceptions of Native Americans come from the Disney movie *Pocahontas*, their first encounter with Native Americans in your course will fall into the categories of “Mmmm, they’re just like Pocahontas!” or “Mmmm, they’re nothing at all like Pocahontas!”

I’m simplifying here, of course, and you can check the resources I’ve listed at the end of the chapter for a fuller and more accurate picture of this issue. But what you can’t do is change the way people learn, or process information. So the best way to confront this problem of the sometimes-faulty filters of students’ prior knowledge is for you to figure out, during the first class or two of the semester, what the students know or think they know about the subject matter; once you have done this, you can spend time in the course addressing those preconceptions and affirming or attempting to correct them.

A simple method for gathering that information is to make use of student information sheets. At some point during the first class, pass out a paper to everyone which asks them to fill out their name, major or possible major, and e-mail address—you can use the latter if you need to send a message to the class for some reason (although many universities now enable you to do this more easily with Web-based e-mail systems, or through the virtual learning environments that I’ll discuss in the next chapter). In addition to asking for this information, though, ask each

student to write a short paragraph in response to two or three substantive questions about their past experiences with the course topic, or about their understanding of the ideas you will be presenting over the course of the semester. These questions can be very simple and general, even personal in scope:

1. In Art History: Describe for me one work of visual art that has really impressed or interested you; what made it stand out for you?
2. In Philosophy 101: What makes a person ethical?
3. In Human Biology: What fields or careers do you think depend heavily on an understanding of human biology?

Students’ responses to these kinds of questions will help you gauge the extent to which they have thought about the course topic in advance, and can help you as well to make the case for why this course will prove useful to them in their academic and professional careers (“Every career depends heavily on the understanding of human biology, kids!”). You can—and probably should—think about the lectures or discussions you are conducting in the second and third classes of the semester in light of the information you will gather from these first impressions of the students.

Happily, you can also use these information sheets to achieve the goals of an ice-breaker, if you are so inclined. In classes of twenty-five or less, this activity takes no more than 15 or 20 minutes, and can go a long way toward easing the tensions that students may feel on the opening day, as well as humanizing you in their eyes, and vice versa. Once you have collected the sheets, use them to take attendance—not simply checking names against the names on your roster, but calling out names and putting those names with faces—and to engage in a brief conversation

with each student as you take the opening-day roll (which can be saved for this point on the first day). As you glance through the information sheets, use their responses to allow you to ask each student a question or two about their academic plans or their ideas about the course topic: if they wrote "Undeclared" on the major question, for example, ask them what they are thinking about; if they claim the *Mona Lisa* as their favorite painting, ask them if they've been to Paris. These questions should not be overly familiar, obviously, but you also don't want to be perceived as grilling them on course content. Don't spend more than a minute with each student; in larger classes, you can be selective, and engage in conversation with a smaller number of them.

Finally, you can use the information sheets as the preparatory material for an opening class exercise in gathering the initial impressions of the group as a whole on the course topic. Formulate a question that you think will help you gain a picture of the group's overall perception of the course topic, and put it on the information sheet—for example, "Tell me the first five things that come to your mind when you think of Native Americans." After you have completed the roll call—with or without the personal banter—explain that you now would like to discuss with them their impressions. Pose the question from the sheet orally—"So let's hear what all of your first impressions are about Native Americans"—and ask for volunteer responses. If no one responds initially, ask a student or two simply to restate or explain their written response. This relieves the pressure for them of having to come up with an answer on the spot, and will usually encourage others to speak as well. As they explain their responses, write them on the board, putting people's ideas into categories or columns that relate to the major themes and ideas that you will cover throughout the semester (for instance, war and weaponry,

social organization, religious beliefs, etc.). In the closing minutes of the class, talk briefly about how the course will address—or not address—the issues that they have identified in their responses.

Thomas Angelo and K. Patricia Cross, in *Classroom Assessment Techniques*, describe a similar exercise called "Misconception/Preconception Check." Acknowledging the existence of student preconceptions on common course topics, and pointing out that student preconceptions are usually misconceptions, they suggest posing questions specifically designed to draw out common student misconceptions and allow the teacher to address them. They give the example of a course in Native American history in which the instructor poses three questions on the first day of class:

About how many people lived in North America in 1491?
 About how long had they been on this continent by 1491?
 What significant achievements had they made in that time?
 (Angelo and Cross, 133)

When the instructor collects the responses, she shows students the widely disparate answers that she receives, but does not provide them immediately with her answers to the questions. Instead, she spends the rest of the class discussing with them the sources of their mistaken notions; then, for their first assignment, the students are asked to find more informed responses to their questions through library research.

Whether you use such fact-based questions to prompt a discussion, or move instead directly to more conceptual questions, you can use the information sheets or simply pose the questions orally and get students' responses that way. However, because students will be anxious and hence more likely to be quiet on the first day of the semester, you should give them an opportunity to

think about your questions before you ask the class as a whole to respond. Try one of two simple techniques here:

1. Ask the students to spend five minutes writing a response to a question in their notebook, recording their impressions in paragraph form or even as simple notes or a list.
2. Ask the students to pair up with a partner to discuss their first impressions, and then have each pair identify three concrete impressions or pieces of information that they have agreed upon together.

Once they have had the chance to brainstorm in these low-pressure activities, they should feel more comfortable reporting their ideas to the class, since they can either read off their response or present their report as the work of a team (and thus help mitigate anxiety that they might give a wrong or stupid answer).

You may find, after gathering these initial impressions of your students over the first few semesters or years of teaching, that students give a pretty consistent picture of their preconceptions of the course topic—at which point you might decide to try alternatives to this opening-day strategy. But making some effort, through this method or another, to gather this information is a worthwhile activity that should help you plan your first semester of teaching more effectively.

A final advantage to the strategy of gathering information from students on the opening day of class (an advantage that I will describe in more detail in Chapter 14) is that you can return to that information during the final days of the semester and demonstrate to the students how far they have traveled from those initial impressions. This might prove a useful demonstration for you as well, one that you can use to gauge whether you have

guided them as far away from those initial impressions as you would have liked.

BIG AND INTERESTING QUESTIONS

You may decide to save the information-gathering process for later in the first week, or use Blackboard or a writing assignment for that purpose. In that case you can consider a second possibility for your opening class, one captured nicely in a short article in the journal *College Teaching* by Kevin Bennett, who described a technique he used in teaching statistics—just the kind of course that probably needs a jump-start to pique the interest of students on the opening day.

Bennett describes opening his statistics course with a birthday celebration—or, more precisely, a celebration of the birthday paradox, which states that “once there are thirty people in a room, the probability that two people have the same birthday is more than 75 percent.” Even before he passes out the syllabus, Bennett begins his statistics classes by explaining the paradox and polling the class for their birthday dates until they find a match (happily, he reports, he has found one every time). As we might expect of a statistician, Bennett has sought confirmation for the effectiveness of his technique through some statistical analysis—comparing student expectations for the course, after the first day, in a semester which began with this exercise and in one which did not. The rate of students who responded that they were looking forward to the course improved from 43 to 82 percent with the use of this birthday demonstration (Bennett, 106).

The struggle to capture and maintain student interest in a course lasts the entire semester, and the first day of the course may be your best opportunity to ensure a successful outcome for the dozens of days that will follow. Sharing intriguing questions, paradoxes, or mysteries that lie at the heart of your discipline, or

even smaller ones that students might encounter along the way, resembles in some ways the narrative technique of beginning a novel or a film at a dramatic moment in the middle of the story—you are offering them a glimpse of the drama to come, and promising that your course will help them understand what now seems completely strange and mysterious.

Obviously, you will need to identify intriguing puzzles or questions in your particular discipline, or in the course topic, which might take a bit of thinking. One route that might lead to such discovery would be to reflect on the reasons you study what you study. You haven't always been interested, for example, in the mating habits of lobsters as your primary research question. Think back for a moment: what about your area of study do you find so fascinating that it keeps you up at night pondering the intricacies of lobster sex? What are the questions and intriguing mysteries that drew you to that area? What are the fields still left unexplored? Why does your subject matter to the world? You may have to take several steps along this route, getting to the more general questions that first interested you in your discipline, but by doing so you might rediscover some of the fascinating features of your discipline—even those you can touch upon in an introductory course—that you can use to connect with your students on the first day of the semester.

The questions or puzzles that you present do not need to be as dramatic or game-like as the birthday paradox. I use a simple exercise in my Introduction to Literature courses to try to interest students in the slippery nature of meaning in language and literature, and to interest them in the course. I put up on an overhead a poem that presents the reflections of an older narrator on a childhood experience with his father—one that I think many students will be able to identify with—and ask them to write down

in their notebooks whether they believe the narrator's attitude toward this experience is a positive or a negative one. I ask them as well to note the specific words and phrases that would support their idea. After five minutes of this, I begin the discussion by getting volunteers to tell me which words and lines they highlighted. We analyze the poem like this for ten or fifteen minutes, at which point it becomes clear that the poet's feelings are mixed—he has both positive and negative associations with his experience. I help the students see that, and then explain that this process is one we will follow for the rest of the semester—reading works that can help to illuminate our own experiences, but also analyzing the written word, and using evidence to support our ideas.

In doing so, I hope to accomplish three objectives: to capture their interest by offering them a poem that can speak to their own lives; to demonstrate to them that they are capable of understanding and analyzing complex works of literature; and to convey to them that interpreting literature does not mean simply giving your opinion—it consists of using evidence to draw conclusions, an intellectual skill that they will need to use in every one of their college courses, as well as in just about every career you could imagine.

Gathering first impressions and introducing students to a central question or mystery of your discipline are just two of many possible openings for a course (see Davis and McKeachie below for other ideas), but they are simple and effective techniques for the first day of your first semester at the head of a college classroom.

As you gain more teaching experience, you may decide to use the first day for other purposes—to begin the slow, painful process of learning the students' names, for example (see Chapter 12

for more on this), or to provide a little bit of your own intellectual biography to the students in order to help them see your approach to the course. You'll grow into these decisions as a teacher. The techniques outlined above are all brief enough to allow for plenty of time for other course business on the first day, and yet are substantive enough to ensure that the first day of the semester is the moment when you begin to fulfill the promises you have made to the students on the syllabus.

Resources

Angelo, Thomas A., and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

See the section entitled "Assessing Prior Knowledge, Recall, and Understanding" (115–158) for suggestions on first-day-of-class activities.

Bennett, Graham. "(Dis)Orientation." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53.9 (November 13, 2006): C2.

A witty description of ice-breaking activities gone bad, at an orientation for new faculty members.

Bennett, Kevin L. "How to Start Teaching a Tough Course: Dry Organization Versus Excitement on the First Day of Class." *College Teaching*, 52.3 (Summer 2004): 106.

Bennett's description of using the "birthday paradox" to open his statistics course.

Davis, Barbara Gross. "The First Day of Class." In *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Davis's chapter on the first day of class offers a complete roster of just about everything that you need to address on the first

day, as well as a list of ice-breakers and other strategies, with very brief explanations of each.

Duffy, Donna Killian, and Janet Wright Jones. "The Opening Weeks: Establishing Community." In *Teaching Within the Rhythms of the Semester*, 121–157. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

Duffy and Jones list lots of strategies for opening the semester, and they are especially good on the more philosophical idea of the importance of fostering a community within the classroom during the first days of the semester.

Lang, James M. "Beyond Lecturing." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53.6 (September 29, 2006): C1.

This includes my description of Michael Gennert's technique for introducing students to the syllabus on the opening day of the semester.

McKeachie, Wilbert, and Marilla Svinicki. *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*, 12th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

McKeachie's book has long been a standard and comprehensive guidebook. See "Meeting a Class for the First Time" (21–28) for McKeachie's suggestions.

Perlman, Baron, and Lee I. McCann. "Student Perspectives on the First Day of Class." *Teaching of Psychology*, 26.4 (1999): 277–279.

The results of this article, a survey of 570 students taking psychology courses at a regional public university, provide an interesting perspective on student expectations for the first day of class, and how teachers can make a strong first impression.

Showalter, Elaine. *Teaching Literature*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003.

See especially the opening chapter, "The Anxiety of Teaching," which describes all of the good reasons we have to be anxious about our first appearances in the classroom.

Toth, Emily. *Ms. Mentor's Impeccable Advice for Women in Academia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

An excellent and witty advice book for the audience described in the title.

Teaching with Technology

A few years ago a student in my English composition course wrote a narrative essay about the process of trying to draft a paper for her history class. The piece was well-written enough that it eventually appeared in the student newspaper, and it presented to the faculty on campus a somewhat disturbing picture of the thoroughness with which technology has penetrated the lives of our students. The student described sitting at her computer, trying to organize her thoughts about the essay topic, but never quite getting her head together amidst the constant interruptions of her ringing cell phone, instant messages from her friends, e-mails from her parents, the rotating selection of songs on her iPod, and the television in the other room blaring a DVD that her roommates were watching. I had a hard time imagining typing my name and address into the computer with all of those distractions, much less writing a history paper.

Walter Ong argued several decades ago, in *Orality and Literacy*, that writing was a technology that changed thought—that the shift from oral cultures to written ones had a profound impact on the way human beings reasoned and thought. Something similar seems to be happening to our students these days, as their brains learn to work under these conditions, and their creative energies