

## Workshop: Teaching on the First Day: Creating an Effective Learning Environment

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2 hours

*This workshop focused on techniques and practices to use on the first day of teaching like focusing exercises, creative introductions and brief assignments that prepare students for the rest of the class. In addition, we discussed the pros and cons of content (vs. logistics) on the first day.*

### SUMMARY

Before I even started designing this class, I was already thinking about the first day of class and the many questions and wonderings it triggered: How would I introduce myself, how could I grab students' attention for the class topic, how quickly could I learn their names and what techniques might help me with that, how to do class introductions, whether to use the whole class period or send them home early, whether to present content, assign homework, etc. I had a whole list of questions and this workshop "came to the rescue". We discussed examples of focusing exercises at the beginning of class, pros and cons of presenting content and icebreakers and creative ways to introduce yourself and students to each other. In addition, we were given a roadmap through the first day of class and examples for each step. This workshop helped me to manage my stress and feel more confident about my first day of teaching.

### APPLICATION

In the workshop we were presented a roadmap through the first day of class "The First Day 5". Here are the five steps and how I implemented them in my class *BIO 295 Islands & Evolution*:

1. **Whet students' appetite for course content** – I used a focusing activity right at the beginning of class, even before introducing myself. I presented an example of a flashy animal (the Aye-Aye) that lives on an island and has evolved a very striking adaptation (a specialized finger). I showed some high quality photos and a short video clip by National Geographic ("World's Weirdest"). This example beautifully captured what this class would be about: Islands & Evolution.
2. **Introduce yourself & facilitate student introductions** – I introduced myself by briefly telling students where I was from and what my professional background was. I also told them what my current research was on and gave them an example of what I like to do in my spare time. To facilitate classroom introductions I asked students to introduce their neighbor to the class. I gave them a few minutes and some questions to ask each other (name, major/science interest, fun/interesting fact, why you think evolution is awesome/what sparks your interest in evolution).
3. **Cover immediately necessary syllabus and policy logistics** – I reviewed all sections of the syllabus in class and handed out signature sheets which included signing the honor code.
4. **Engage students in ways of learning that you'll expect from them all semester** – I presented the class format as a graph (Fig. 1) and used the format for presenting some content right afterwards (with the exception of a guest speaker). I explained what evolution was and how islands are interesting when studying evolution, I used a case study to illustrate this and finished the class with a summary (I used minute papers for students to reflect and review class material, students are asked to answer two questions).
5. **Assign homework** – At the end of class I gave students a take-home assignment. I asked them to find an organism with an island or island-like distribution and present it briefly at the beginning of the next class period.

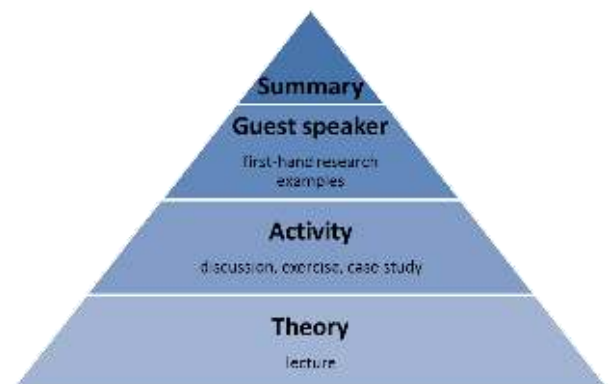


Figure 1: Class format: *BIO 295 Islands & Evolution*