

## Five teaching strategies for the first week of semester

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The first class of the semester is important for both students and instructors as it sets the tone and clarifies expectations. If you would like to have an interactive classroom, make sure to have an interactive first session. If you want students to ask a lot of questions, encourage that on the first day. Here are a few teaching strategies for the first day of semester.

1. **Learning about students:** On the first day of semester I ask students to complete a short questionnaire with their name, their background (e.g. undergraduate major for graduate students), what they hope to learn in the class or what interests them in the class, future plans. This helps to know something about students and is especially useful for large classes where there isn't enough time to have students introduce themselves.
2. **Free association exercise:** with my undergraduate class, I do a free association exercise around the concept of 'city' as the class focuses on urban issues. I give students a few minutes to free associate, and then I ask them to identify which of their free associations are positive, negative or neutral. Then we discuss some of the positive, negative and neutral associations with the idea of the city. This links up well with showing some artistic renditions of city life that I like to show in this class (e.g. the impressionists, Edward Hopper). This is a simple prompt, requiring no background information. It is ideal for undergrads especially from diverse backgrounds.
3. **Build a model:** for my housing markets masters class, I ask students to create a 'model' of the housing market. Students complete the exercise in groups, and then the class reconvenes to discuss. The instructions are somewhat vague – which is fine, it allows students to define a model in different ways. Usually a fairly complicated model emerges which helps to highlight the

complex nature of the housing market. We will then use the model to do an in-depth case study of the eviction moratorium during covid in the US (students will read news articles on the moratorium before class).

4. **Analyze a paper:** For a masters class, I will ask students to analyze a paper and write their insights into a shared document. The session can then pick up on these insights for a more in-depth class-led discussion. I am doing this in week 1, although of course this can be done anytime during semester. Such an exercise ensures that students have actively engaged with the material prior to class. As this is a workshop style class, this exercise will hopefully also generate a list of shared strategies that students can draw on in their own work.
5. **Avoid devices:** having students put away laptops and phones in face-to-face classes is useful for the general energy of the class. This is best done on day 1 of class to make your expectations clear from the start.