
Promoting professional excellence for faculty and graduate students

Compiled and edited by Michael Palmer, Faculty Consultant, Teaching Resource Center.

Building rapport with your students goes a long way toward developing a positive classroom dynamic and facilitating the students' overall learning experience. One of the simplest ways to begin connecting with your students is to learn their names. What follows is a compilation of some tricks, strategies, and activities which will help you quickly learn your students' names. Several of the methods will also encourage your students to learn each others' names as well.

Tried & True Tips: Applicable to a variety of class sizes and pedagogical styles, these easily implemented ideas will have you calling your students by name before you know it.

Before your course begins, *peruse the ID photographs* often available through course management systems. To do so at UVa, first log into UVaCollab (<https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/>). Select the course you're interested in from the tabs along the top of the page, then chose 'Roster' from the left-hand menu. Switch from 'Overview' mode to 'Pictures' and then click the 'Print' button in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.

Review students' first names several times before the first class, trying to memorize as many of them as you can. Then use the names as often as reasonably possible in the first few classes. Review the names right after class, picturing faces with names and noting any distinguishing characteristics.

In the second or third class, *review students' names with them*; e.g., "You're Bill, right? Susan. Your name is Mark." This feels risky, but students love it. When you cannot remember someone's name (or when you pretend you cannot), ask other students for help. You will find that you know many more names than your students.

If you have a few minutes to yourself, just before class or during group activities, *spend some time testing your knowledge of students' names*: Which ones can you name? What are the names of those you cannot identify? What identifiable characteristic will help you remember certain students?

Have students bring a tent card that sits on their desk or table and displays their names to others in class. This serves as a visible reminder to you and rest of the students. If, instead, you have the students pick up their tent card from you before each session, you not only have the reminder, but you also have a means to track attendance.

Personally *return assignments to your students* during individual or group activities. While this can be time consuming at first, it allows you to associate written names with faces. It also allows you to associate the work, style, penmanship, etc. with the student.

Frequently *use the names of students you do know*, those who participate, who come to your office, whom you find memorable for any reason. Students whose names you don't use will tend to feel that you know them, as well. This strategy is especially effective in large classes.

In large enrollment courses, you probably can't learn the names of all your students. Confess this and then let students know you feel strongly that it is important (1) they know you and know how to reach you, and (2) they know other students from whom they can get help and support. Be sure to put your name and contact information up on the board (or PowerPoint) and also point out where this information is in the syllabus. Next, *instruct the students to learn the person's name to their right and to their left*. Those seated on the ends have a shorter task. Have them *exchange names and contact information*. This ensures that each student has at least one support person. Inform students that you will do this for the next couple of class periods. It's important to encourage them to sit in different parts of the room so that they meet new people. In the second class, ask the students to introduce themselves to one person seated around them that they do not know and exchange contact information. Now, every student has two support people.†

Not-So-Tried but True Tips: Particularly helpful in small to medium or discussion-based classes, these ideas will not only help you learn your students' names but will also help your students get to know each other and feel comfortable with each other.

Speed Naming: Tell students that in order to have open, engaging discussion it is important that they know each others' names. Give them three minutes to learn as many of their classmates' names as possible. You may have to remind them that it's OK to move. Then, with each student standing in front of her seat, announce, "If you can name at least five of your classmates, keep standing; otherwise, sit down." Choose one student who is still standing to name five people. As the student names her classmates, have the named student raise his hand. Continue by increasing the number of students to be named, e.g. "If you can name at least ten (or fifteen or twenty) of your classmates, keep standing; otherwise, sit down." Again, select a volunteer to name the number of students requested. The repetition will help the students *and you* learn names quickly. In subsequent class periods, begin by asking, "Do you know all of your classmates' names yet? If not, take 30 seconds to introduce yourself to the students you don't know." Time permitting, "test" them again.

Commonalities: Arrange your students into groups of three or more, have them introduce themselves to each other, and then come up with three (not-so-obvious) things they all have in common. Have them report back to the class with brief introductions, incorporating their commonalities.

Alliterating Adjectives: Ask each student to pick an adjective which starts with the same letter as their first name and also defines a personal characteristic, e.g. Enthusiastic Ellen or Gregarious Greg. The alliteration is fun and serves as a mnemonic for remembering their name. Ask the students to introduce themselves and explain their choice of adjective.

Playful Repetition: One successful strategy requires each student to say her name as well as the names of all the students in front of her. For example, the first student would say "I'm Ann" and the second student would say "I'm Bob, that's Ann," etc. By the time it's the last student's turn, everyone's name has been repeated (and corrected for pronunciation) several times. Another memory aid starts with the students in a circle. One student tosses a ball or object across the circle while saying the name of the person catching the ball. Everyone must catch the ball before anyone touches it twice. Once everyone has been named, ask the students to see how fast they can repeat the process without dropping the ball or forgetting a name. For variety, use two balls simultaneously. Complete both exercises by trying to name every student. Be sure to make the activities fun, so that students who are not aural learners or who have bad memories do not feel pressure to perform.

Little Known Fact: Ask your students to share a "little known fact" about themselves, something memorable, interesting, weird, or unusual. In addition to sharing the information directly to the class, the students can write their unknown fact on information sheets, which you can use to help remember them and get to know them better.

Alphabet Soup: Make a game of calling role. Begin by sorting your class roster by first name. When you take "role," choose a letter of the alphabet at random—or ask a student to pick one. If the letter is "D," for example, call role only for students whose first names begin with "D," e.g. the Davids, Donnas, etc. Ask each student to stand as you call their name, and if time permits, ask them to tell something about themselves that will be hard for others to forget. (It's beneficial to tell students in advance to expect this so they can think of a good response.) Switch letters each day. You can also open class with the "name of the day." Put up an unforgettable trait from the last group of introductions and see if the class can come up with the first and last name of the student to whom the trait belongs.†

Scavenger Hunt: Try a scavenger hunt based on a set of questions related to the course that students ask each other. Invite students to find a different person who can respond "yes" to each question, e.g., Who has traveled to Europe? Who speaks another language? Who knows two causes of the American Revolution? Who has done volunteer work with small children? After students have had time to find colleagues who fit the descriptions, the follow-up discussion can include getting more details about the activities most pertinent to the course.

† Contributed by Ed Nuhfer, Director of Faculty Development California State University Channel Islands