

NOT QUITE 101 WAYS TO LEARN STUDENTS' NAMES

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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* on Instructional Toolkit (<http://toolkit.itc.virginia.edu/>). To access the pictures, set up a course page in Toolkit, download your class roll, and then click on the photo icons next to the students' names. You can also view and print all the photos by selecting 'Display photo composite of the entire class (PDF)'.

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.

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.

"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.

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.

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.