



COLLEGE & CAREER
AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND NATURAL RESOURCES
AFNR Teacher Guide

The First Day of Class

The following information has been adapted for Illinois teachers of Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources. Original guides are publicly accessible from the from a Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching (CFT) on [the CFT Teacher Guides web page](#).

What is the first day of class?

The first day of class is a powerful opportunity to establish a shared vision for the agricultural education program, and specifically that AFNR course, for the upcoming year. Successful educators introduce themselves as scholars and seekers of knowledge as well as provide expectations for classroom operations, coursework, and advertise opportunities to engage beyond the classroom (FFA and Supervised Agricultural Experiences).

What should a teacher consider when planning the first day?

Beyond the specific class, syllabus, and expectations for the year, successful agricultural educators understand the bigger picture of the first day. Students may still be “shopping” for the right schedule, looking for class to fill a specific block or period, or maybe looking for a particular learning environment. For these reasons, students will appreciate a clear outline and vision of what this course and you as their teacher will require of them to succeed over the course of the semester.

How can I model the entire course in one day?

There are two primary questions students will want to answer about each class on the first day.

- What will we learn in this class? (meaning the units, skills, objectives, and class content)
- How will we be learning in this class? (meaning the activities, workload, and style of teaching)

To answer the first question, an overview of the course is appropriate. The simplest, effective version of this is to review a comprehensive course outline that includes the expected units or topics. Students may have questions about the meaning of new terms or ideas in the course outline. Some successful educators present this information in a perceivably more engaging format, such as a self-guided web quest on the “classroom website” or even a customized virtual classroom. While the method or learning activity may change, the intent of answering what will be learned in this class is consistently found on the first day.

To answer the second question, you may include this information in a course syllabus. Related questions may regard the class grading system; behavioral expectations; policy on classroom technology and cell phones; and even significant course milestones, such as projects and assessments. In addition to explicitly addressing or reviewing these concepts, it may also be effective to model the typical working environment for your classroom. For example, if the course requires a significant amount of group work or group projects, you may want to have students work in groups to complete any planned first day activities.

How do I create an inviting classroom?

Establishing an inviting classroom culture is not something that can be accomplished in a single day. It is a continual process that occurs over the span of an entire year. However, teachers can use specific strategies to start this process on the first day of class. Some helpful ideas to begin developing an inviting classroom culture are introducing yourself, allowing students to introduce themselves, discussing and evaluating the classroom space together, and communicating key course information.

How to Introduce Yourself Effectively and Appropriately

Introducing yourself to new students will be different for each teacher. This is, in fact, the point. The goal of your self-introduction is to establish yourself as a unique individual sharing a common space, time, and goal with other unique individuals (the students). Other than your name, here are some ideas you might consider when sharing with your students:

- Provide a brief personal biography to include where you are from, any family you wish to share, educational history, appropriate recreational interests like sports teams and hobbies, how long you have been at this specific school or district, and your plans for the future.
- Give an explanation to why you chose your current profession to include your specific interests within AFNR and perhaps how you were first introduced to agricultural education. This may prove an effective tool in relating to students as you may find yourself explaining stories or memories that mirror what they are about to experience.
- In deciding what to share when introducing yourself, it is important that you consider how much you want your students to know and what you are comfortable sharing. While some educators prefer to be more open and transparent with students, others also find success in drawing boundaries between personal and professional lives. Finding the right “balance” or “harmony” is important, and this can set the tone for student-teacher interactions moving forward. It is also important to remember that you can always choose to share more information as you feel appropriate or relevant throughout the year.

Allowing Students to Introduce Themselves Comfortably and Efficiently

Student introductions are your opportunity as a teacher to focus on them as unique and diverse individuals. Teachers should consider how their response and use of the information shared by students will influence classroom culture throughout the year. Students will vary in the information they are comfortable sharing, so it is best to start with simple pieces of information. Then allow students to share additional information as they are willing. If using a pre-formatted introduction worksheet or student information page, this may be represented in an open-ended question or category. Some ideas to consider are:

- Student name to include preferred pronunciation and/or use of an alternative name
- Reason for enrolling in the specific AFNR course or program
- I learn best when my teacher...
- Something my classmates should know about me is...
- A fact about me is...

If using a pre-formatted introduction worksheet or student information page, be sure to collect those completed documents and organize into a digital or hard copy filing system. Management of student information can be crucial as they progress through the course. A file may also be expanded throughout the year to include assessments, progress reports, noted ideas or interests, etc. This information is helpful for use during conferences or meetings with administrators or student guardians. It is also helpful in advising students as they choose Supervised Agricultural Experience programs, participate in FFA activities, and plan for postsecondary education and/or career opportunities.

Discuss and Evaluate the Classroom Space Together

The physical space of a classroom can play a large role in the efficiency and culture of how a classroom operates. When planning your classroom, consider aspects such as acoustics, direction or flow of student foot traffic, effective distribution of supplies and materials, student grouping or collaborative learning, and alternative seating. Once a classroom plan is established and students are oriented to their surroundings, it is helpful for teachers to review and discuss each of these intentional components. It may be helpful to address the following questions for each aspect of the classroom or laboratory space:

- What is the purpose of this space or aspect?
- When will students use this space or aspect?
- How will this aspect affect students' learning?

Communicating Key Course Information

As students may still be experiencing changes in schedules and determining which classes are the right “fit” for them, it is critical that teachers share the relevant information about the respective course. As described previously, the “what” and “how” of the course must be addressed. To be more specific, a teacher should communicate the following items regarding the AFNR course:

- Course outline to include topical units and an expected timeline
- Behavior expectations and requirements
- Learning management systems to be used to include a brief tutorial, if needed
- Class policies on key rules, such as grading, late work, tardiness, and technology use
- Responsibilities of the teacher and teachers’ aide(s), as appropriate
- Responsibilities of the student and student guardian(s)
- Exchange of information to communicate with teacher and students after the first day

The First Day of Class Checklist

Use the checklist below to help you plan your first day.

- Introduce yourself effectively and appropriately.
- Allow students to introduce themselves comfortably and efficiently.
- Discuss and evaluate the classroom space together.
- Communicate key course information.

What are some additional resources relating to this topic?

Explore the resources below for more information on a successful first day of class as an educator.

- Angelo, T. A., and Cross, K. P. Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers. (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.
- Erickson, B. L., and Strommer, D. W. Teaching College Freshmen. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991.
- “The First Day of Class: Advice and Ideas.” Teaching Professor, 1989, 3(7), 1-2.
- Johnson, G. R. Taking Teaching Seriously. College Station: Center for Teaching Excellence, Texas A & M University, 1988.
- McKeachie, W. J. Teaching Tips. (8th ed.) Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1986.
- Scholl-Buckwald, S. “The First Meeting of Class.” In J. Katz (ed.), Teaching as Though Students Mattered. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 21. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
- Serey, T. “Meet Your Professor.” Teaching Professor, 1989, 3(1), 2.
- Weisz, E. “Energizing the Classroom.” College Teaching, 1990, 38(2), 74-76.
- Wolcowitz, J. “The First Day of Class.” In M. M. Gullette (ed.), The Art and Craft of Teaching. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.