

How you
introduce yourself
on the first day
may determine
how much respect
and success you
will have for
the rest of the
school year.

Your Reputation Precedes You

Right or wrong, accurate or not,
your reputation will precede you.

People have reputations. You know of people who are sweet, kind, honest, industrious, and dependable and others who are sleazy, curmudgeonly, arrogant, lazy, and undependable.

Businesses have reputations. Some have terrible service, sell shoddy merchandise, and do not guarantee their products. Other businesses you can trust implicitly.

Companies with good images, such as IBM, Coca-Cola, Sony, Hallmark, Nordstrom, and Hewlett-Packard, enhance their sales. Companies with poor images, try as they may to change them, suffer in their sales. This is why companies spend billions to create a corporate image—because they know that people buy from companies they trust. Their image precedes a sale.

Your Image Enhances Sales

HALLMARK:	"When you care enough to send the very best"
LEXUS:	"The relentless pursuit of perfection"
KODAK:	"Depend on us"
WATERFORD:	"Worthy of the moment for over two centuries"
TIMEX:	"It takes a licking and keeps on ticking"

Even before you first see your students, your success at winning their respect and attention may have already been predetermined by your reputation. **Right or wrong, accurate or not, your reputation will precede you.**

- ✓ If you have a good reputation, the students will enter your classroom with high expectations, and this will be to your benefit.
- ✓ If you have a poor reputation, the students will enter with low expectations, and this will be to your detriment.

Whether you like it or not, the students will talk about you, the parents will talk about you, the administration will talk about you, and your colleagues will talk about you.

Everyone likes and supports a winner. Parents want their children in the classes of the teachers with the outstanding reputations. Teachers with poor reputations often get what's left after all the sifting and shuffling of students and teachers has been done.

You will attract better students, have a minimum of problems on the first day of school, and generally be much happier with your job if you have students who want to be in your class. It makes no sense to be a teacher that no one wants to have as a teacher.

**Protect your reputation and create a positive image.
You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.**

She Got the Leftovers

I am sure that many of your readers after reading your article would feel that Mrs. T was treated unfairly when relieved of her teaching duties. I taught in the same school for 25 years so I'm aware of what was happening in the years that she taught.

Many parents and teachers would agree that junior high students in the last 10 or 15 years have become more difficult to handle and that discipline of the age group is more and more of a problem. Mrs. T's inability to handle her class was common knowledge.

It took real courage for the school board and administration to say, "For the good of the children this teacher has to go."

As to the claim that her classes were packed with problem children: The policy in our school at the time was that parents could request a certain teacher or ask that a child be reassigned. Many parents, knowing of the problems, asked that their children not be in Mrs. T's room.

Those who were left were often the most difficult discipline problems and Mrs. T got them.

—Letter to the Editor
San Jose Mercury News.
November 13, 1988.

Preschool Invitation or Visit

Here are some welcoming techniques used by effective teachers. Apply and adapt the examples to your situation.

1. Send a letter home to the parents **BEFORE** school begins.

- ✓ Tell the parents that you are looking forward to having their child in your class.
- ✓ Ask them to put the dates of the school's open house on their calendar, and explain why it is important for them to attend. You will be explaining homework, grading, discipline, and classroom procedures.
- ✓ Include information on what materials you want the students to have ready for school.

The Importance of Parents

Parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. What parents do to help their children is more important to academic success than how well off the family is.¹

2. Send a letter home to each student **BEFORE** school begins.

- ✓ Include a message of welcome.
- ✓ Tell the students who you are.
- ✓ Invite them to call you if they have questions.
- ✓ Help them prepare by listing the materials they should have with them. They will be ready if you are ready. Do not surprise your students.
- ✓ Tell them your, not their, expectations.

3. Visit the home of each student **BEFORE** school begins (check to be sure that this is an appropriate thing to do).

- ✓ Introduce yourself.
- ✓ Bring the letters just described with you.
- ✓ Share with the parents how they can help.

¹U.S. Department of Education. (1986). *What Works: Research About Teaching and Learning*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, p. 7.

In Awe and Admiration

Dear Mrs. Mundy,

My daughter, Angela, attended Longfellow School last year. Her teacher's name was Miss Sather. The reason for this letter is to officially give a parent's commendation of the performance of Miss Sather.

First of all we moved to Minot just weeks before the school year was to begin. After I registered my daughter for school I did not expect any communication from the teacher until after the first day of school. However, Miss Sather came to our house a few days before school began to welcome Angela to her class. That may seem like a small factor, but it made a big impression on me and it helped my daughter in adjusting to a new school.

Never, in my life, have I known any other teacher who cared so much as to do this for a student. Later I learned that this is a common practice for Miss Sather.

Additionally, her classroom was always orderly, well organized and disciplined. She involved the parents in the students' learning by sending home parent-child homework assignments and notes of problems or progress frequently. She used positive methods of discipline and gained the respect and love of her pupils.

Other parents, my husband and myself included, were in awe and admiration of her. She is an extremely talented and outstanding teacher. I would like to ask that she be recognized for her efforts.

Sincerely,
Mrs. JKM



Sherry Sather Braaten

Am I in the Right Room?

Douglas Brooks discovered that the very first thing a student wants to know on the first day of school is, "Am I in the right room?"² **Finding the correct room on the first day of school can be one of the most frightening experiences for a student.** There is nothing more embarrassing than to discover that you are in the wrong room—15 minutes after class has begun.

Dear Dr. Wong,

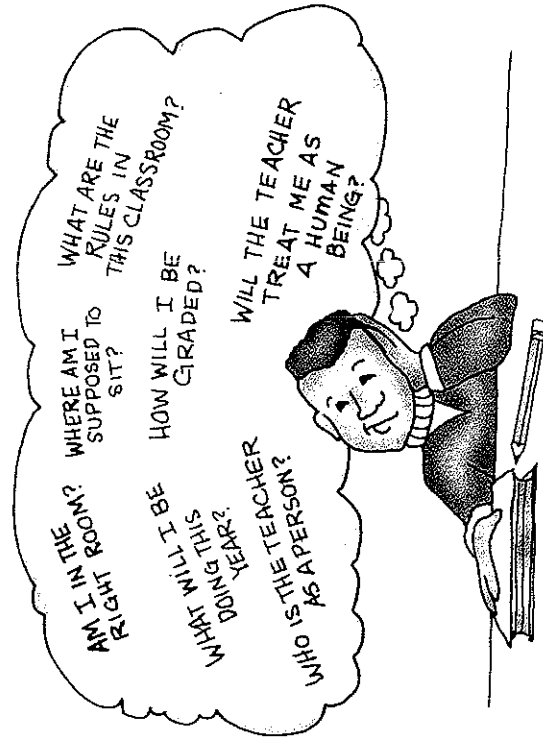
When I came home from your in-service meeting, I asked my 13-year-old son the following question: "What's the most frightening thing about the first day of school?"

After thinking for a moment, he said, "Two things—having the teacher mispronounce your name and walking into the wrong classroom."

—Classroom teacher
Garland, Texas

How to Greet Them on Day 1

Stand at the classroom door with a big smile and a ready handshake. You do this when company comes or when meeting people. Airline, restaurant, and auto dealership personnel do it. Effective teachers do what is obvious—not what everyone else is doing at school. If you're the only one standing at the door with a smile, does that make you wrong and the others right? Of course not! It makes you more effective at what you do.



These are the seven things students want to know on the first day of school.

²Brooks, Douglas. (May 1985). "The First Day of School." *Educational Leadership*, pp. 76-78.

Here is a successful technique used by many effective teachers for greeting students on the first day of school.

Step 1. Post the following information next to the classroom door:

- ✓ Your name
- ✓ Room number
- ✓ Section or period, if appropriate
- ✓ Grade level or subject
- ✓ An appropriate welcome or greeting

The students can see the information on the wall and can compare it to the correct information on their registration form.

This is no different from finding flight information posted at each gate at an airport, a doctor's name on the office door, or movie information, times, and prices at a theater box office.

Step 2. Stand at the door on the first day of school. Have a smile on your face, hands ready to shake the students' hands, and a look that says you can't wait to meet them.

Step 3. As they stand there, wondering if you are the right teacher and this is the correct room, welcome them to a new school year and tell them the following information:

- ✓ Your name
- ✓ Room number
- ✓ Section or period, if appropriate
- ✓ Anything else appropriate, such as seating assignment



I love to stand at the door on the first day with a giant smile on my face, hand stuck out in an invitational pose, waiting for those "little darlings" to come down the hall.

Step 4. Check each student's registration card, and if the student is in the wrong place or is lost, help the student or find a guide who will.

Step 5. After you greet a student, the student should be able to enter the classroom and see the same information written or posted in the room:

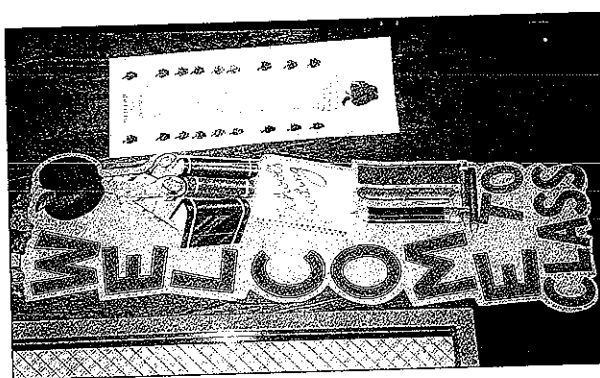
- ✓ Your name
- ✓ Room number
- ✓ Section or period, if appropriate
- ✓ Grade level or subject
- ✓ An appropriate welcome or greeting

Because the students are exposed to the same information three times, it is highly unlikely that any students will be in the wrong place on the first day of school. Their anxiety level and their tendency to be confrontational are reduced, and they will feel welcome and at ease.

What has just been suggested as an effective and cordial way to start a new year should be obvious. Have you ever gone somewhere on an errand or for an appointment and been unable to find the right address, building, or office? You know how frustrating that can be.

Perhaps you have driven to a strange place and wished the streets were better marked. Or you were in an unfamiliar store and wished there was someone around to help you find what you were looking for.

Everything possible should be done to welcome the students and to make sure that they know where to go and how to get there on time.



Help your students find your room by posting information at the door as well as inside the classroom.

Seating Chart and First Assignment

If you choose to have assigned seats, tell each student this fact upon entering the door. Do not rearrange the seating after the class is all seated. The students will moan and groan over why they have to move and why they can't sit near someone.



How to Help Students Find Their Assigned Seats

- ✓ Have their names on place cards on the desks.
- ✓ Have their names written on a seating chart transparency that is projected onto a screen.
- ✓ Give them an index card with a letter and a number on it, such as B5, A8, C3, and ask them to find their seats based on the seating chart that is projected. Do not use this method if you feel it will be too difficult for your students to figure out two coordinates. You want them in their seats when the bell rings, not running around confused.

As the students go to their assigned seats, inform them that they will find their first assignment at their seat. **Tell them to start to work on it immediately!**

The first assignment should be short, maybe interesting, easy to complete, and successful for all students. It may simply be an alphabet or number sheet or an information form that will not be graded.

How NOT to Start the First Day of School

The ineffective teacher suddenly appears through the door just as the bell rings. The teacher's name and the room number are nowhere to be found. The teacher regards the class with an icy stare. The first day of school goes like this:

1. The teacher stands behind the desk, glaring over eyeglasses, inspecting everyone walking in with a look that says, "You're infringing on my space."
2. The teacher never mentions a name, the room number, the class, the grade level, or the period.
3. The teacher announces that he or she will call the roll.
4. The teacher also announces that as the roll is called, the seating assignments will be changed so that everyone is seated in alphabetical order. A collective groan arises. (See "Succeeding with Your First Request," page 114.)
5. The teacher calls the first student and points to the student sitting in the first chair and demands, "Up." That student rolls his eyes and goes and leans against the wall.
6. The teacher then points to the first student and says, "You, sit there."
7. As each student is dislodged from his or her chair, students lounge along the wall.
8. The students are all looking at each other, shaking their heads, "Who is this disorganized person? Our teacher? It's going to be a long year!"

You greatly increase the probability that school will start successfully for both you and your students when these four points are true:

1. You have your room ready.
2. You are at the door.
3. You have assigned seats.
4. You have the first assignment ready.

The important thing is to make a statement to your students about your efficiency and competence as a classroom manager and teacher. **What you do on the first day may determine how much respect and success you will have for the rest of the school year.**

How Students Are to Enter the Room

Observe how your students enter the classroom. You need to begin teaching procedures and routines (Chapter 20) the moment you meet them at the door on the first day of school.

- ✓ Ask any student who enters the room inappropriately to return to the door and enter appropriately. You do not send the student out of the room but rather to the door. You do not want to send anyone "out of the room" in the very first minute, as "out of the room" has a negative connotation.

- ✓ Do not make dubious remarks like these:

"Try coming in again correctly."

"We walk into this room like ladies and gentlemen."

"You walk in properly, understand?"

- ✓ Rather, calmly but firmly, do the following:

1. Ask the student to return to the door.
2. Tell the student why.
3. Give directions for correctly entering the room.
4. Check for understanding.
5. Acknowledge the understanding.

Are You and Your Students Enigmas?

Display some information about yourself. Post your diploma. Graphically describe your personality and expectations. As soon as possible, make every student a welcome part of the class. Put something on a bulletin board from each student, with the student's name on it. Putting something up from each student makes each feel a part of the class.

The more that students know about you, the more likely they are to respect you. And the same can be said about the students—the more they know about one another, the more likely they are to respect one another.



Let your students know who you are.

Example

Todd, please come back to the door. I am sorry, but that is not the way you enter our classroom. You were noisy, you did not go to your seat, and you pushed Ann.

When you enter this classroom, you walk in quietly, go directly to your seat, and get to work immediately on the assignment that is posted. Are there any questions?

Thank you, Todd. Now show me that you can go to your seat properly.

Don't forget the importance of using the student's name, please, and thank you. (See Chapter 11.)

Your manner and voice should be gentle and calm, even with a smile, but firm. Your voice should communicate that you are not the least bit flustered or angry. You are simply in control and know what you expect from your students, and you are communicating this expectation.

It is a mistake to let any misbehavior, such as entering a room inappropriately, go unchallenged under the rationale that you will have time to deal with this later. Effective teachers know that it will be much more difficult to correct misbehavior at a later date.

Ineffective teachers bark and yell, have no guidelines or expectations, and assume that misbehavior will correct itself. Asking students to enter the classroom according to a set of procedures indicates that there are definite boundaries to what they can and cannot do in your room.

It is important that you state the correct procedure for entering the room at any time of the day. Rehearse this procedure until it becomes automatic. Praise the students when it is done properly, and encourage them to make it a routine every day. It is best to save what has been explained in this paragraph until after you have introduced yourself as suggested in the next section.

How to Speak to the Class



Master teacher,
Jim Heintz.

Stand up when you address the class, and speak in short, clear sentences or phrases. Students have a way of turning off long, complex sentences. Your purpose is to establish authority and understanding, not to impress with your intelligence. Most important, students will gauge their confidence in you by how you say what you want to say.

You do not need to speak loudly.

The most effective teachers have a firm but gentle voice. Learn to "speak loudly" with your tone, not your volume. When you speak softly, the class listens carefully. You modulate the noise level of the class by the loudness of your voice. And on those rare occasions when you would need to raise your voice, you will have twice as much impact.

Learn to use nonverbal language.

A nod, a smile, a stare, a frown, a raised eyebrow, or a gesture is often all that is needed, and it does not even disturb the class at work. Body language can speak volumes. Use it to manage the classroom and minimize disruptions.

Your Important First Words

There are two major things you want to state at the outset on the first day of school: **your name and your expectations.** It behooves you not only to tell the class your name but to pronounce it so that they will call you by the name you want.

Students want to know who you are as a person and if you will treat them as a person. (See "Seven Things Students Want to Know," page 105.) It is important that you allay any fears they may have about being in your class. The best way to do this is to smile, exude care, and communicate positive expectations.

Example

Welcome. Welcome to another school year.

My name is Mr. Wong. There it is on the chalkboard. It is spelled W-O-N-G and is pronounced "wong." I would like to be addressed as Mr. Wong, please. Thank you. I am looking forward to being your teacher this year. Relax. I have over 30 years' experience as a teacher. I am what is called an experienced teacher, a veteran teacher.

Outside of class, I go to workshops, conferences, in-service meetings, college classes, and seminars. I also read the professional journals and work together with my fellow teachers. So you know I am up-to-date in my professional knowledge and my teaching skills. And I love to teach! I enjoy teaching, and I am proud that I am a teacher. So you can relax. You are in good hands this year with me, Mr. Wong.

You are going to have one of the greatest educational experiences of your life. We will not only study (subject), but I will also share with you some life-skill traits that will help you to be successful in tomorrow's world. I can assure you that if you should run into me at the shopping mall 25 years from now, you will say, "You were right, Mr. Wong. That was the most memorable, exciting, and fascinating class I ever had."

So welcome!

You Will ...

On the first days of school, learn to begin many of your sentences with "You will ...". The first few days are critical. This cannot be stressed enough.

Your mission is to establish student habits, called procedures in this book, or routines. If not, **students will develop their own habit patterns in classes where teachers do not teach procedures and communicate expectations.** These habit patterns spread, and soon the entire class develops its own agenda, its own curriculum, and its own set of procedures. It's the third day of school, perhaps, and you have just lost your class.

The effective teacher establishes control right from the start to prevent the classroom from becoming a breeding ground of confusion and discontent. You can ease up after you have control of your class.

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Your Room Is an Introduction to Yourself

- ✓ Have a spot ready with schedule, rules, procedures, calendar, and a big welcome.
- ✓ Have an assignment posted before the students walk in. Post the assignment in the same consistent location every day.

The students now know what to expect from you the rest of the year.



The Effective Teacher

1. Cultivates a positive reputation.
2. Communicates with parents and students before school starts.
3. Greet the students with positive expectations.
4. Has the seating assignment and first assignment ready.