

Preparing for a Successful Semester

Before the Semester Begins

1. *Communicate with your professor*

You need to know your role and responsibilities:

- When will you meet with the professor during the semester?
- Are you expected set up and maintain the CourseWorks site?
- How frequently should you hold office hours?
- How can you get desk copies of assigned texts?
- Will you have the opportunity to lecture?
- Are you expected to hold review sessions?
- How quickly should you return assignments and tests?

You also need to know class policies

- Can you still add students?
- Is there an attendance policy?
- What about late papers and missed tests?

2. *Prepare a section syllabus*

A syllabus sends the message that the section is serious and substantive. It should include:

- A description of the section's purpose, its relations to the lecture, and your role
- Your contact information
- Your grading policy (including how you handle grade disputes)
- Your office hours
- Your email policy
- Your attendance policy (including how you handle absences and tardiness)
- Your policy regarding late assignments and make-ups
- Your policy regarding laptops
- A list of key dates
- Guidelines for classroom discussions
- A list of campus resources including the writing center, counseling center, ombuds office, and the center for students with disabilities.

Anticipate potential problems. Set a policy—and stick to it.

3. *Speak with experienced Teaching Fellows*

Don't reinvent the wheel. Experienced TAs will generally be willing to share handouts, assignments, and activities.

Just Before the First Class

1. *Decide what kind of tone you want to set.*

I'd recommend that you be accessible but professional. Decide what you'd like your students to call you. Decide what forms of dress are appropriate. Remember: your body language and appearance send powerful messages about who you are.



Columbia University
Graduate School of Arts &
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- Supports improvements in the assessment of learning outcomes
- Works collaboratively to improve public education through community and school partnerships

To arrange a one-on-one consultation, contact:

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