

7 Keys To The First Day Of School

by Michael Linsin

The first day of school is about setting the tone.

It's about focusing on the first wee little steps leading to the most memorable school year your students have ever had.

There is no room for weak first impressions, no room for indecisiveness, and no room to leave your students bored or uninspired.

It's best to think of the first day of school as a microcosm of the coming year. In other words, it should represent who you are and what you want your classroom to be.

The seven keys below may not be the only items on your agenda, but in terms of making an impression on your students, they're the most important.

And are not to be missed.

1. A smile.

It's so simple, but also so very important. A smile to greet your students is the first step to building rapport. It's the first step to creating a trusting, close-knit relationship with your new class.

Remember, if your students like you and trust you, then classroom management becomes much, much easier. A smile activates instant likability—and so much more.

2. A peaceful pace.

Establish a peaceful pace to your classroom by speaking calmly but firmly, taking your time, pausing often, and never moving on until you get exactly what you want from your new students.

These powerful strategies will begin grooving the initial learning and behaving habits that make for a mature, attentive classroom.

3. A routine.

With your new students eager to please, early the first morning is the perfect time to send the message that you expect excellence in everything they do—even the most mundane routines.

Teach a highly detailed lesson on how to enter your classroom in the morning—or any other common routine. Be of good cheer, make it enjoyable and participatory, but set your expectations beyond anything they've ever experienced.

4. A story.

Storytelling is a powerful medium. Teachers who use it to their advantage—to communicate profound truths, fire imagination and wonder, awaken indifferent students, and more—are infinitely more effective.

A fun or unusual anecdote about you, perhaps from your childhood, will initiate that first spark, that first inkling that being in your classroom is going to be different, and somehow, some way . . . wonderfully special.

5. A plan.

Although you'll use the rest of the first week to teach your classroom management plan in depth, it's important to give an overview of your rules and consequences on the first day. The reason is twofold.

First, your students need to know your boundaries so you can begin enforcing them. Second, it's an opportunity to express your deep commitment to protect their right to learn and enjoy school without interference.

6. A lesson.

Send the message that yours is a classroom of focused, get-down-to-it learning by jumping into academics on the first day . . . but not with just any lesson.

Choose *one thing* you want them to understand or know how to do and teach the heck out of it. Show them something unique, something they haven't seen or experienced before. Be at your best, and they'll start the year excited about learning.

7. A little fun.

Show your students that your sky-high expectations extend beyond behavior and academics. To be in your classroom also means to have fun.

Small doses of humor throughout the day, a getting-to-know-you activity, a simple openness to enjoying your students—any of these will do. The idea is to establish a classroom environment that balances hard work with camaraderie, friendship, and joy.

In other words, a classroom they look forward to coming to every day.