



## Connecting with Students in the First Weeks

Our students today are seeking instructors that are invested in them, not just their learning. Establishing a connection early on can be important, but it can be difficult to get to know students at the beginning of the semester. Taking a little extra time to connect pays off with students during the semester, as they are more likely to be invested in their learning. Here are some easy ways to make those connections early on in order to foster positive relationships throughout the course.

### Easy Ways to Connect

- Use index cards to have students write their preferred name/nickname and/or pronouns. Collect them and pass them back out every day as students come into the class. This helps to quickly connect names to faces, as well as take attendance or shuffle cards for different groups. It's also a great chance to greet them individually and connect.
- Encourage them with points or extra credit to update their Moodle profiles with some of their interests, majors, etc. This helps you to be able to look up what you may have in common with them, or what they may have in common with each other. Students can also add their name pronunciation to their profiles using [Moodle's multimedia tool](#).
- Students appreciate when you take an interest in them—ask them questions about their hobbies and interests, and be sure to share yours with them. For example, having students pick a “walk up” song, asking students to debate favorite characters of shows/books/etc, and sharing pictures of pets.
- For more asynchronous ways to connect, I create a couple of “checking in with you” short assignments on Moodle several times during the semester. Students will often open up with what they may be struggling with if you ask. Students have really appreciated a follow up to see how they were doing with it, or pointed them towards potential [student resources at OU](#) or extra help.

Approaching students first instead of waiting for them to come to you really helps students that may feel anxious asking for help.

- Asking students to fill out a survey with questions about what they are seeking to gain from class, what resources they may need, and what challenges they may face in class or at home to keep them from being successful. This can be done as an anonymous [Who's in Class survey](#), a more detailed [student questionnaire related to class content](#), or in whatever way best works for you and your students.

## Conclusion

More than ever, students coming from the rupture of the pandemic are seeking to make connections and build relationships. Although it can be difficult to connect when we have so many students, a few small steps can create a classroom environment where students feel seen and a part of a classroom community. Investing in our students as people, not just learners, can make a huge difference in their learning. Early connections with students sets the stage for positive relationships throughout the semester.

## About the Author

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