

Knight Institute

for Writing in the Disciplines

FWS Instructor Workshop
First Day/Icebreaker Ideas

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Rather than spending your first class session with students reading and talking about the course syllabus, consider instead activities like those presented here that promote interactivity and community-building; establish course expectations and classroom etiquette; and introduce and sample the intellectual work of the FWS.

My first-day lesson plans prioritize activities that showcase a typical day (what will we do and how will we do it). I also start every day during the first two weeks with an icebreaker activity related to my course content (food!) or to writing.

While I do think it is important to present my course syllabus and Canvas site, I prefer to offer only a brief overview on the first day and to scatter my discussion about course logistics and policies over the first two weeks. For instance, I discuss details about submitting assignments, like formatting expectations, deadlines, late, and grading policies when I assign the first writing assignment.

And not everything on the syllabus needs to be discussed at all. Some of my colleagues have students complete a syllabus quiz (with room for them to ask questions) for homework during the first week to ensure that students have read and understood what to expect.

First Day(s) Essential Features

Introducing Course *How will you immediately engage students in the intellectual work of the course?*

What -- *What is this course about? What topics/questions/materials will we be exploring together this semester? (Readings, Collections, Films, even general topics of inquiry)*

How -- *How will we work together and learn? What will a typical day/week/unit look like? What will we/I do? (Informal and formal writing assignments, projects, presentations)*

Why -- *Why is the course built this way? What will I learn and why is it important?*
(Learning goals and outcomes and how they transfer to other contexts)

Consider how this writing assignment from WRIT 7100: Teaching Writing can help you draft these ideas: [FWS at a Glance](#)

Showcasing a Typical Day *How will you immediately engage students in the intellectual work of the course?*

- Class Discussion
- Collaboration | Start discussion with Small-Group Work, Pair Share
- Engagement with textual/visual material
- In-class independent or collaborative writing activity
- Brainstorm ideas/outline a sample draft for the first writing assignment – as a class or in small groups
 - Sample first assignments and [Guidelines for First Assignment](#)

Building Community with an Icebreaker

Rationale

- Learning names/pronunciation/preferred pronouns
- Set a tone/expectation for engagement and collaboration
- Begin developing group cohesion
- Establish connection to course material (topic and/or writing)
 - Icebreaker question ideas:
 - *What is an essential and unique feature of your writing process?*
 - *What is your writing super power?*
 - *Follow this link for more ideas:* [Icebreaker Activity Ideas](#)

Logistics

- Whole class/Small groups/Partners?
- Spoken/Written/Write-to-Present?

Presenting Course Expectations/Logistics *What content can be delivered alternatively?*

- Pre-Semester Assignments
 - [Student Profile](#)
 - [Micro-Narrative Assignment](#)
 - [Introduction Slideshow](#)
- Canvas (or other LMS) walk-through
 - Create a 3-5 minute video in which you orient students to your Canvas course. Introduce yourself, the course, and then switch to a shared screen where you demonstrate how to navigate your Canvas site and/or explain the work plan. Highlight how you use modules, assignments, where your course calendar is, and what "class time" will look like during the remote period. You might also describe central course features--like a grading policy--works, major assignments, and the logic behind your assignment

sequencing and scaffolding. These videos are quick to make and help orient students quickly as students enter the course throughout the Add/Drop period. (For more on this topic, follow this link to the KNIGHTLYnews post "[Getting New FWS Students Oriented Quickly](#)")

- Typical Course Expectations (Participation/Engagement/Attendance, Deadlines/Late Paper Policies, Accommodations)
 - Syllabus quiz (to be completed in or out of class, independently or in pair or small groups)
 - [Syllabus Quiz \(National Association of Geoscience Teachers\)](#)
 - [Syllabus Quiz \(University of Oklahoma\)](#)

RESOURCES

- [FWS Instructor Sandbox](#) Find here pedagogical resources that can help you develop an online platform for your FWS -- whether you are interested in building a remote-access, fully online course or in simply developing a robust Learning Management System (LMS) to support multimodal instruction for an in-person or hybrid course. You'll find start-up tips and guidelines for recommended digital tools, links to campus and Knight Institute resources, videos of teaching demonstrations and workshops, and detailed lesson plans and activities that you can import directly into your FWS Canvas site.
- [KnightlyNEWS: Notes from the FWS Classroom](#) Find here an online forum where FWS instructors and other teachers of writing swap and share ideas for best classroom practice. Weekly posts are designed to help teachers develop lesson plans and writing assignments, and respond to classroom challenges by introducing new teaching tools and sharing emerging pedagogical ideas. Posts also direct readers to program and campus resources that support teaching and learning, and provide opportunities for peer collaboration and mentorship.
- [Indispensable Reference for FWS Instructors](#) Consult this reference as you build and teach your FWS. Topics include: Building your FWS Syllabus, Preparing to Teach your FWS, FWS Course Evaluations, Submitting Course Grades, Responding to Students of Concern, and Professional Development.

Contact

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