



## Setting the Tone on the First Day of Class with Generative Games, a Kite, and Toast

### SPEAKERS

Alexia Franzidis, Tierney King, Jeremy Caplan

#### **Tierney King** 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. The first day of class is fast approaching, and this day is filled with emotions. Your students might be filled with excitement or dread. They may be feeling eagerness or anxiety. But no matter the emotions, it's an important day for you to set the tone for the rest of the semester. In this episode, we'll go through specific activities that you can integrate for your first day of class to start. Alexia Franzidis offers ideas on how you can use the first day to set the tone for a semester of learning through different activities.

#### **Alexia Franzidis** 00:49

So the first day of class is where we set the scene for the rest of the semester. It's a great opportunity for us as instructors to introduce ourselves, both personally and professionally. And also to get to know the students, it's also a chance for us to introduce the subject matter. So the students have an idea about the types of things that they're going to be learning throughout the semester. So I'm a big fan of trivia. And so one of the big things I like to do on the first day, is I get the students to divide themselves up into small groups, and they introduce each other, you know, within those groups, and they come up with a team name. And they then have to do trivia. So I will ask things like, what is the late penalty for handing in an assignment two days late? You know, have to look in the document, or I'll ask them to read it beforehand, and they'll come up with an answer. And then that way we kind of actually work through. So it's important for you, if you're going to do that sort of thing, it's important for you as an instructor to really figure out what are those key things that you know, are important for you within your class that you want the students to know and turn it into like a trivia or a quiz. Another activity that I find is very good at stimulating interaction, but on a bit more of a smallest scale, is what we call the kite. So in the kite, you get the students to pair up or go into small groups of about three, maybe four, and you get them to draw their own kite. So it is, you know, kite with four quadrants, and then a string, and within that string, you've got about three little ribbons. And so you ask the students then to put stuff in each one of those quadrants. So the first one you do is you get them to put down where they're from. Now the nice thing about the kite is that students aren't allowed to actually write any words. So it's all drawing. So it's kind of a fun activity as well, because most of our students aren't, you know, amazing drawers. But it also just makes them creative. I mean, you know, drawing makes people get more creative. So the first one is where you are from. The second one is what is your proudest moment?

That's usually a fun one to draw. Then you do what do you want to be doing five years after graduation, that's in the third one. And then the fourth one is the best place you've ever visited. So you get the students to draw those four things. On the ribbon, the ribbons that are at the bottom, the three ribbons, you then write down, so the one time you actually write down, three people either dead, alive or fictional, that you would like to invite for dinner. And so you get each student to do this, individually, and then in pairs, or in small groups, and then share that information with each other. So it's a fun activity, you usually give the students about five or 10 minutes to actually draw in the cart. And then after that, they get to go and share it.

#### **Tierney King 03:44**

In addition to an activity, you may want to be open and honest, telling your students what your class has to offer them, while also giving them the opportunity to create sort of wish list for the class.

#### **Alexia Franzidis 03:56**

You also tell the students what you're going to give them. So for me, as an instructor, I'm always going to come to class and I'm going to be prepared. And I'm going to be creative and think about ways that I can make the content that they need to learn interesting and fun and interactive. I'm also going to be flexible on certain things, or I'm going to be empathetic. So I tell them the things that I'm going to give them throughout the semester. I then ask them to think about what are they going to bring to class? What are they going to give me in return? So I'm giving them things, what are they then going to give me and the class in return? So are they going to be punctual? Are they going to be turning in their assignments in time? Are they going to be respectful towards each other? And so the last thing I do is I get them to think about what are kind of their wish lists. What would they like? Would they like to have a sort of free pass for coming into class one day late? Would they like to have the opportunity to drop the lowest grade in the class or an assignment, or would they like to have the opportunity to have some kind of, you know, bonus activity at the end to replace a low grade. So what I say to them then is, you know, these are things that they may want, these are privileges that they may want, if they give me the things that they say they're going to, if they're going to be respectful to one another, if they're going to be whatever, then they will get these privileges. However, if they don't do what they say they're going to do, then they're not going to have those privileges. And so by turning the syllabus into a working document, where the students actually will look at it, and they'll scrutinize and they'll be aware of the content, and also then means that they remember the types of things that are important within the class, and some of those key topics, and that will help them really absorb the materials that are specified within the syllabus.

#### **Tierney King 05:59**

Jeremy Caplan also offers quick generative games to get students thinking and get their minds going in his program, How Can I Maximize the First 10-minutes of Remote Teaching to Spark Student Engagement?

#### **Jeremy Caplan 06:11**

So generative games are ones where students are coming up with ideas, they're basically thinking in an open way. So in one example, I'll give them a term and ask them to come up with a bunch of other terms that they associate with that term, or that come to mind. And it could be anything depending on

what you're teaching, the term could be entrepreneurship, or the term could be mitosis. Or the term could be sectarianism, it really doesn't matter. And it's very easy. You can do it with any sort of technology, even just a piece of paper, they can use the chat space and your online meeting software, they can use a shared document if that's easy. And the idea is just to be generative with your thinking, think of a variety of different terms that come to mind. You can vary this, you can ask them to define the term in six words or less, or you can ask them to come up with similar terms, or terms in parallel fields or whatever else you want. But the idea is that they're generating things in a creative way. A generative game can also be something as simple as giving them an object that you may have with you like, a paperclip, for example, and asking them to come up with five uses of that paperclip. And this may not be connected directly to your subject matter, but it allows them to just open the session with some creative thinking and primes their mind for open mindedness. A second kind of activity is the combination kind of game, the combinatorial game, and that's where you take two concepts and ask them to find a bridge or find a connection, find a parallel, this could be something like, let's say investigative journalism and audio in journalism context. And a student might come up with something like an investigative audio project, a podcast about the educational systems in certain countries. Or the topics might be dissonance and chord progression. If you're teaching harmony, or music theory, and the students might find a bridge between those two concepts or ideas, it could also be a combination, like truth and blank, if you're teaching philosophy and allow them to come up with other concepts linked to truth, for example. And finally, it might be two objects that you're asking students to connect. In an engineering class, you might say, take a pair of headphones in a box. And so what could you combine these to make in some interesting way with new technology, and students might come up with a box that fits the the headphones more effectively, or a box that plays music from the headphones or allows the headphones to send music to another set of headphones. The point is to get students thinking creatively to have a little fun. And to do something quickly and easily. They can do this individually. Or if you prefer to have them work with colleagues, they could do that. Even in a breakout room if you choose to make it a social activity and build interaction to this as well. The third kind of game is an inspiration game. And this is something where you often have a constraint of some kind. So one constraint could be the number of words they can use. So for example, in a philosophy class, you might say, give me a definition for truth. In just six words that you'd use for a layperson, someone who's not trained in philosophy, or the constraint might be, we're going to do this design. We're going to think about design for a design class, for example. And we're going to design something that makes a coffee cup more engaging paper coffee cup. And what can we do and a student might come up with? Well, let's put numbers on the outside and create a drawing pattern. So students so people can create something visual with their coffee cup, or someone else might say, let's put something inside the coffee cup. So it changes color according to what liquid you have or what temperature it's at. Someone else might say, let's make the coffee cup compactable so that it's recyclable, reusable, and you can put in your pocket so students can come up with interesting, inspiring kinds of ideas, that again, get them thinking in a positive way. It may be connected to the topic or subject matter that you're focused on and build some momentum and enthusiasm for whatever is going to come next.

### **Tierney King 09:52**

Additionally, there are numerous other activities you could choose from to start your first day. In the recommended resources you'll find numerous links, but here are a few other activities to consider. This activity is from Dr. KB, who starts her online course with a link to a Google Form that's created before

class. It has the following questions: What are your top three strategies teachers of your courses have used to help you be successful? What are the top three strategies teachers of your courses have used that have not contributed to your success? Are there ways in which the technology and materials used for your courses could be made more accessible? What do you expect to see in an inclusive classroom? What do not expect to see in an inclusive classroom? What are the rules of engagement we should adapt for this class that would help create an inclusive learning environment? So for this, the instructor doesn't collect student emails when they submit their responses. This way, they can be more open in their thoughts. And then after everyone's submitted their responses, she summarizes them before the next class and shares them with the class while offering suggestions on how to practice specific responses throughout the course. The next activity is about toast. Yep, toast! So this is inspired by the TED Talk, An Introduction to Systems Thinking and Wicked Problem Solving. So as soon as everyone enters the room, you say, take three minutes and draw a picture of how to make toast without any words. Explain how to make toast to someone who has never made it before. After time is up, ask students to share their drawings and place them into groups or breakout rooms, use the following questions to help guide their discussion: How are your group members individual illustrations similar? In what ways do you group members individual illustrations differ? Which illustrations are clear and why? Which illustrations contain surprises and what are the surprises? Which is the one illustration your group feels best illustrates how to make toast and why? After 10 minutes of discussing have the group share their answers to the class. This activity leads the class and discussion about diversity of opinions, the value of different interpretations of the same topic, and the merit of working together to collectively synthesize meaning. We hope your first day is inspired with ideas and have no doubt your students will be fully engaged and ready to take on your course. Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.