

## What Should You Do on the First Day of Classes?

Bassett, J. F., & Nix, P. (2011). Students' First Day of Class Preferences: Factor Structure and Individual Differences. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 13(3), 373-381. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=buh&AN=75255848&site=eds-live>

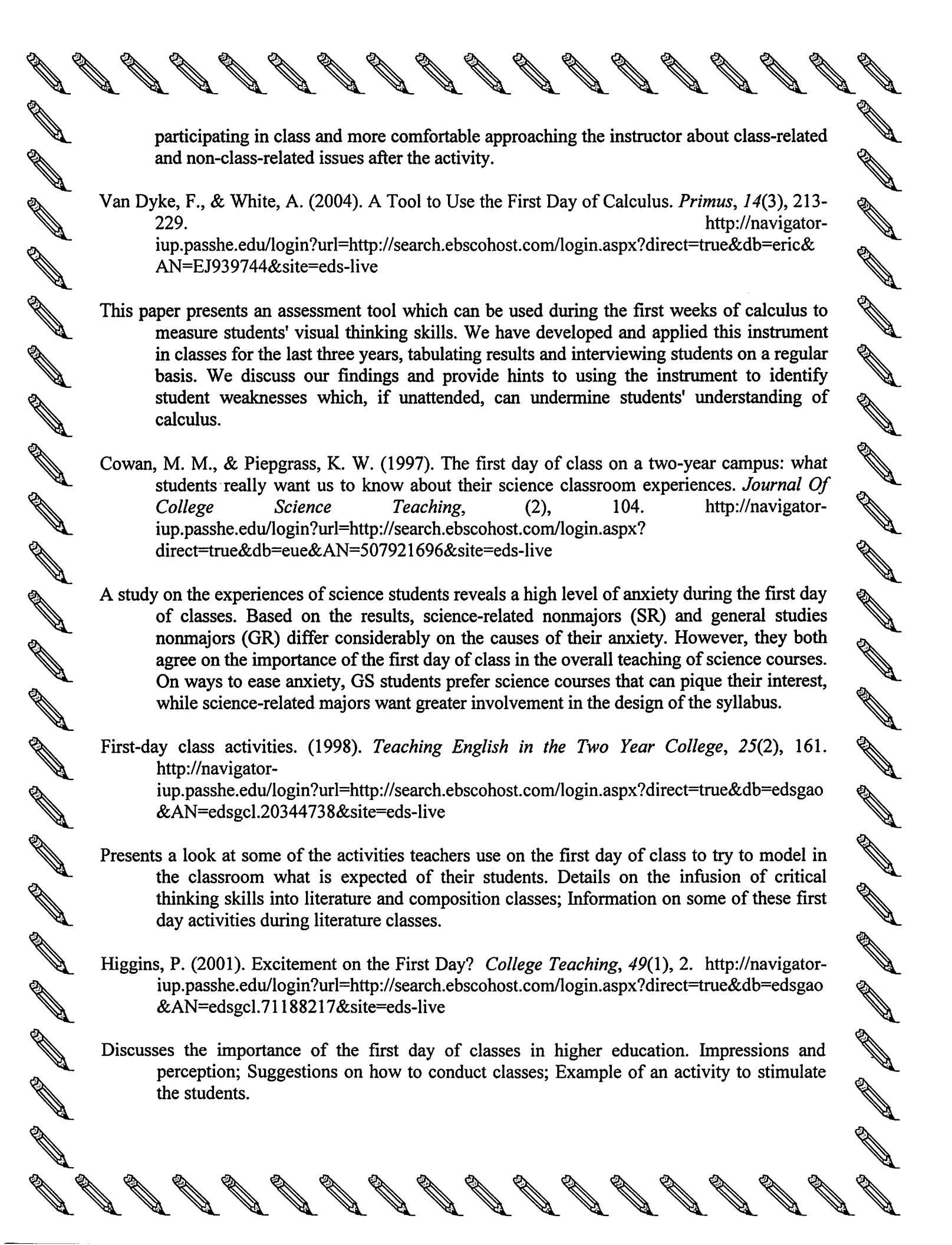
The results revealed that students' preferences for instructor's behavior on the first day of class could be divided into five factors. Students viewed information about course difficulty as the most important aspect of the first day of class, followed by professional information about the instructor, information about the structure/content of the class, procedural details such as attendance and tardiness, and learning personal information about the instructor and other students respectively. Students rated the personal information factor as more important in general education than major classes. Further, ratings of the importance of this factor were positively correlated with feelings of connectedness in student-instructor relationships.

Winston, F. (2007). First Day Sociology: Using Student Introductions to Illustrate the Concept of Norms. *Teaching Sociology*, 35(2), 161-165. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=25117758&site=eds-live>

This article discusses the first day of an introductory sociology course which provides a crucial first impression to both instructors and students. It discusses the three essential features of a social norm. After each student provides information about himself or herself, the stage is set for a discussion of how their self-introductions relates each of the characteristics of a norm. The instructor also draws observations of nonverbal behavior from the students. The students gained an appreciation of the sociological imagination and gathered some basic information about their classmates.

Hermann, A. D., & Foster, D. A. (2008). Fostering approachability and classroom participation during the first day of class: Evidence for a reciprocal interview activity. *Active Learning In Higher Education*, 9(2), 139-151. doi:10.1177/1469787408090840. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=508077270&site=eds-live>

Students and faculty often have different goals for the first day of class. While teaching advice books recommend actively engaging students in the course from the start, students often 'shop' for classes and report being primarily concerned with gathering practical information. The aim of this article is to introduce a reciprocal interview activity that attempts to achieve both goals by creating a dynamic conversation in which the instructor inquires about the students' goals and expectations and, in turn, the students collectively interview the instructor about his or her goals and expectations. Preliminary findings indicate that students evaluate the activity favorably and feel more comfortable



participating in class and more comfortable approaching the instructor about class-related and non-class-related issues after the activity.

Van Dyke, F., & White, A. (2004). A Tool to Use the First Day of Calculus. *Primus*, 14(3), 213-229. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ939744&site=eds-live>

This paper presents an assessment tool which can be used during the first weeks of calculus to measure students' visual thinking skills. We have developed and applied this instrument in classes for the last three years, tabulating results and interviewing students on a regular basis. We discuss our findings and provide hints to using the instrument to identify student weaknesses which, if unattended, can undermine students' understanding of calculus.

Cowan, M. M., & Piepgrass, K. W. (1997). The first day of class on a two-year campus: what students really want us to know about their science classroom experiences. *Journal Of College Science Teaching*, (2), 104. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=507921696&site=eds-live>

A study on the experiences of science students reveals a high level of anxiety during the first day of classes. Based on the results, science-related nonmajors (SR) and general studies nonmajors (GR) differ considerably on the causes of their anxiety. However, they both agree on the importance of the first day of class in the overall teaching of science courses. On ways to ease anxiety, GS students prefer science courses that can pique their interest, while science-related majors want greater involvement in the design of the syllabus.

First-day class activities. (1998). *Teaching English in the Two Year College*, 25(2), 161. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.20344738&site=eds-live>

Presents a look at some of the activities teachers use on the first day of class to try to model in the classroom what is expected of their students. Details on the infusion of critical thinking skills into literature and composition classes; Information on some of these first day activities during literature classes.

Higgins, P. (2001). Excitement on the First Day? *College Teaching*, 49(1), 2. <http://navigator-iup.passhe.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.71188217&site=eds-live>

Discusses the importance of the first day of classes in higher education. Impressions and perception; Suggestions on how to conduct classes; Example of an activity to stimulate the students.

## First Day of Class Interview Discussion Topics and Guidelines

### **Instructor-led interview discussion topics (10–15-min. discussion; 15–20-min. interview)**

1. What are your goals for this course? To learn new skills? To become better educated? To learn the subject matter? To fulfill a requirement? To get a good grade? To apply your learning to other aspects of your life? Something else?
2. How can the instructor best help you achieve your goals? Lectures, exams, discussions, practice, office hours (think back to excellent professors/courses you've experienced)?
3. What, if anything, have you heard about this textbook and/or course from others?
4. What reservations, if any, do you have about this course?
5. What is the best thing that could happen in this course? What is the worst thing?
6. What resources do you bring to this course (e.g. prior experience, prior courses)?
7. What norms of behavior or ground rules should we set up to ensure that the course is successful (e.g. mutual respect, question asking, punctuality, etc.)?

### **Student-led interview discussion topics (5–10-min. discussion; 15-minute interview)**

1. What are the instructor's objectives for this course – what does he or she hope to accomplish?
2. What is the instructor's theory of learning (i.e. how do people learn?).
3. What is the instructor's approach to evaluating student's learning in the course?
4. What are their expectations of you?
5. What are the instructor's expectations of you?
6. What is the instructor's anticipated role in the course?
7. Anything else that may be important to you (e.g. aspects of the syllabus, assignments, text, exams, etc.)

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Questions taken from: Hermann, A. D., & Foster, D. A. (2008). Fostering approachability and classroom participation during the first day of class: Evidence for a reciprocal interview activity. *Active Learning In Higher Education*, 9(2), 139-151. doi:10.1177/1469787408090840 <http://alh.sagepub.com.proxy-iup.klnpa.org/content/9/2/139.full.pdf+html>

# HOW TO START TEACHING A TOUGH COURSE

## DRY ORGANIZATION VERSUS EXCITEMENT ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Kevin L. Bennett

Teachers usually enjoy the first day of class, regardless of students' perceptions coming into the course. I have found a technique that makes even difficult courses exciting for both teachers and students. For the past several years, I have included a celebration exercise on the first day. It works great across disciplines and is especially effective for more challenging and demanding courses.

In psychology, for example, courses such as statistics and research methods are notoriously difficult. In statistics, I demonstrate the birthday paradox, a fun activity that serves as a glimpse of things to come and involves every student. The birthday paradox states that once there are thirty people in a room, the probability that two people have the same birthday is more than 75 percent. I go around the room and have people state their birthdays until we find a match. Suddenly, students are interested in math and are trying to figure out why the birthday paradox works (it has not failed yet). This is just one example from psychology, but every field has examples that would be effective.

Many students expect the first day to be a less-than-sensational day of reviewing the syllabus and course objectives line by line, but your class can be so much more. Before I employed this technique, student comments after the first day ranged from apathy to frustration: "I don't know what to think of this course"; "This is boring"; or "This is going to be too hard." I moved my typical first day organization duties (dis-

cussion of the syllabus and course procedures) to the end of the class period. Now, I start class by introducing myself and launching into an interactive and energizing discussion of research examples that will draw them into the course material. In fact, I do not even distribute the syllabus until I get through this demonstration.

Over the course of two semesters teaching statistics, I conducted an informal survey after the first day that read: "I am looking forward to the material in the class." In the first semester (without the technique), only 43 percent of students strongly agreed with this statement. In the second semester (with the technique), this number shot up to 82 percent. The end of the year evaluations also were higher for the second class, and I believe this partly is because of the way the course was initiated.

By giving students an interesting and inviting introduction, I was able to reduce anxiety about the course and help students view the class as a collaborative learning process. Every field has its own exciting research or striking examples, and it is a good idea to present a few of these up front. The teaching challenge is to find special ideas within your own field. Your class will thank you.

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