



## FAQs

### FAQs for the First Days of School

*Teaching is the only profession with a first day each and every school year.* Other professionals have their first days of work but only once in a career.



#### What Should You Wear?

Teachers recommend dressing as professionally as possible.

Follow your own personal preferences but present yourself to students and their parents as a cool and comfortable, well-groomed professional.

On the dressy-casual continuum, most teachers land in the centre. While some suggest a dressy dress and shoes or suit and tie on the first day, most stress comfort. You will have to take into consideration climate, school norms, and grade level as well as your own personal taste.

Sitting on the floor or handling paints and paste may dictate very casual clothing or, better yet, a smock that suits you. In middle and high school, males can wear a subject-related tie and females a pin or other subject-related accessory.

Dress up on the first day. **Look your professional best.**



#### What Should You Say First?

Somehow we believe that first words are magical and make or break a situation. If we can get the first sentence right, all will go well thereafter. In reality, your students will never remember what you said first, but because it is of primary concern to new teachers, here are some ideas:

*The Welcomers:* "Hi, I'm so glad to see all of you. We are going to have a super year."

*The Introducers:* "I'm Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and here are Boris and Natasha, our classroom pet rats."

*The Managers:* "What a nice line. I hope it's this way all year. Please walk in quietly and find a seat."

*Our Personal Favourite:* "Mistakes are permitted in this class."

## How Much Should You Tell about Yourself?

Beginning teachers are concerned about what to be called by children and how much to tell the class about themselves. In all but the most special circumstances, it is most appropriate to be called by your last name preceded by Mr., Mrs., or Ms. In some cases, primary teachers may be called by their first names (e.g., Mr. Mike or Miss Susan).

In all cases, write your name on the chalkboard and pronounce it with your students. During attendance, children can easily learn your name by responding to your salutation "Good morning, Juan" with "Good morning, Mrs. Matsumoto."

The majority of teachers today tell students something about their personal life and professional background. They commonly tell their pupils about their families, why they love teaching, why they became a teacher in the first place, their pets, summer vacations, interests, prior career or experiences, hobbies, and any apparent physical disabilities.

How much you share will depend on your personal style and philosophy. You can share a little at a time as the year progresses as you prefer, but do share something about yourself that first day. Even minimal self-disclosure (the type and name of your pet, your favourite hobby) will ease the tension, satisfy curiosity, and bring you down to earth, where the kids can reach out to you. Developing rapport with the students in the class is an essential task that first day. Hopefully, you have enough suggestions for getting through the first two minutes of the day. It's time to sit down and relax.



## How Do You Assign Seats?

In the old days there were two ways of assigning seats – alphabetical order and size order. If your name began with the letter Z or you were tall, you were guaranteed a seat in the back. Your saving grace was poor vision, poor hearing, or disruptive behaviour. These were the three mitigating conditions that upgraded your seating to first class, front row centre. But times have changed. The overwhelming majority of teachers favour self-selection as opposed to prearranged seating, at least the first day.

Allowing kids to choose their own seats on the opening day of school is their first exercise in decision making and taking responsibility in your classroom. We adults are often unhappy about assigned seats in airplanes, in theatres, and at dinner parties. We like to find our spaces and feel comfortable in them. And since we are creatures of habit, once we choose, we like to stay put.

Kids feel the same way too! Does this mean that once they have chosen their seats they never move? Never say never. Several circumstances are described by teachers who only partially subscribe to the self-selection pattern. They suggested two adaptations:

Choices are modified when special needs arise or seatmates are incompatible. Usually, arrangements are not finalized until the end of the week and still can be modified thereafter. Kids choose new seats every month—or two or three times per year—for a change of scenery, and their choices are subject to teacher modification should the need arise.

Another popular seating assignment method is random selection by lots. Students draw numbers that correspond to numbers on the desks. These selections are subject to teacher modification, and lots can be redrawn every month or several times per year. In this method there is a certain degree of fairness based on chance, but the risk is that no one may be happy with the outcome, least of all the teacher, who has to deal with the complaints.

At the other end of the continuum from free choice and random selection are the prearranged, teacher-determined seating assignments. Although teachers who prearrange seating are in the minority, they base their decisions on three variables: ability, alphabetical order, or desire to integrate the sexes, the races, or ethnic groups. It is important to point out that prearranged seating can be dysfunctional.

In the first case, seating by ability group can stigmatize children and is not necessary, since kids can easily change places for special remediation or enrichment. In the second case, ease of learning the names is not a good enough reason for seating in alphabetical order, since last names are not the common form of address and the Z's will always be in the back! A seating chart is a more reasonable way of solving memory lapses anyway. Finally, trying to achieve balance on all important variables (sex, race, ethnicity, size, ability) through seating will drive you batty, so why not let free choice prevail? Step in when necessary to correct obvious imbalances, especially when using cooperative learning strategies.

If you do prefer assigned places, label the seats or spaces on the floor with name tags and let the students enjoy the challenge and excitement of finding their assigned places on the first day. If they can't read, you can shape or colour code their names and seat tags to make the task easier.

## **How Can You Learn the Students' Names?**

There is no greater compliment to a student than calling him or her by name at

the end of the first day. It requires concentration and extra effort but it can be done. Always check the pronunciation with the student. All kids should have the option of going by a nickname or shortened version they prefer. Teachers suggest some tried-and-true methods that will work for you, too, and even by lunchtime dismissal on the first day, you can wish each child a good meal using his or her name. Here are some suggestions:

One teacher associates the names with faces from photos. Individual photos taken at the time of the class picture, are often attached to the permanent record cards. Take time to make the name-face association before school starts. Children will be shocked and pleased to be recognized. You can borrow a Polaroid-type or digital camera and take instant pictures of the students, table by table or individually. Writing the names below the faces will help you remember who's who. Once the photos have served their purpose as memory aids, you can use them to create a lovely welcome bulletin board. Name tags and name plates are very popular aids for learning names. Teachers place them on desks or on the front of desks, pin them on young children's clothing, or string them around primary youngsters' necks (upside down so children can read them when they look down). You can have older children make their own and decorate them. After kids have chosen or have been assigned to seats, one of the most useful devices for learning their names is the seating chart. You can get a jump on the process by having the blank chart or map ready to go. The names just have to be filled in when you take attendance or look at the name tags. This is the preferred method in middle and high school. Some teachers learn the names through simple **interaction or games** like the ones that follow.-->

### **Primary Grades**

The teacher holds up name cards, and the children recognize their names, retrieve the cards, and place them in the designated spot. The teacher can call the names as well at the beginning, but should encourage recognition solely by visual cues early in the year. The child then says his or her name and one thing about a favourite toy, pet, food, or television program.

### **Intermediate Grades**

Students introduce themselves to the class. They can be given some guidelines and time constraints:

Tell us your name. Tell us something about your family or your pets. What do you do after school? What are your favourite television programs?

Note: Students can be given a three-minute egg timer to hold to remind them they can talk under but not over the limit. This places the responsibility for self-monitoring with them and makes it unnecessary for you to interrupt or stop them.

Review alphabetical order by having children come up in small groups and alphabetize themselves, using their tags or cards.

### **Upper Grades**

Children can interview a partner, following a set of guidelines, and then introduce the partner to the rest of the class. Guidelines can be duplicated, or children can make up

the interview questions with you and the outline can be written on the chalkboard. Some suggested guidelines follow:

partner's favourite subject in school partner's least favourite subject partner's favourite kind of stories partner's pets partner's favourite sports, hobbies partner's favourite television program language(s) spoken at home

Probably the best way to help children learn each other's names is to practice the name game. Each person introduces all the others preceding, going around the room or up and down the rows in this manner:

MARIA: I'm Maria.

JASON: This is Maria; I'm Jorge.

PABLO: This is Maria, Jorge; I'm Pablo.

RYAN: This is Maria, Jorge, Pablo; I'm Sebastian

ELENA: This is Maria, Jorge, Pablo; I'm Sebastian; I'm Elena.

JULIO: This is Maria, Jorge, Pablo; I'm Sebastian I'm Elena; I'm Julio.

This technique also works very well with adults. Not only does the systematic repetition enable me to learn the names of 25 students in a few minutes, but it also allows everyone else in class to do the same. No name tags are needed for this one!

Another simple introductory activity is having the students describe themselves to the class using only three adjectives. Some suggest that secondary students get into small groups and reach consensus on one favourite for each of these suggested topics: music group, food, movie, TV program, and so on.

