

40 Things You Can Do to Retain and Engage Students

Start Off Strong

1. Hit the ground running on the first day of class with substantial content.
2. Introduce yourself, why you are a teacher, and how you feel about your subject.
3. Give students an icebreaker so they can meet and learn about each other.
4. Hand out an informative, artistic, and user-friendly syllabus.
5. Give an assignment on the first day to be collected at the next meeting.
6. Give a learning style inventory to help students find out about themselves as learners.
7. Greet students at the door when they enter the classroom. Learn their names.
8. Start and end the class on time.
9. Have students share what they want to know, their expectations for the course, or what they fear about taking the class.
10. Express clear expectations (ground rules on absences, late work, testing, grading, and classroom behavior) and stick to them. Establish and share clear rubrics for grading.

Promote Help-Seeking Behaviors

11. Direct students to financial aid, tutoring labs, library, computer labs, writing and reading centers, career transfer center, counseling, and other student support services. Organize a scavenger hunt and offer extra credit for bringing back information and flyers. Or take students on a “field trip” during class to these offices and labs.
12. Announce student drop-in hours (i.e., office hours) frequently.
13. Hand out business cards with your office number and email address.

Build Connections

14. Set up a buddy system so students can contact each other or form study groups.
15. Take pictures of students in small groups or individually and post in the classroom.
16. Form small groups for projects; mix and form new groups several times.

Motivate Students and Make Class Relevant

17. Start with a puzzle, question, picture, or cartoon on overhead or PowerPoint.
18. Have students set goals – for the class, for their future, for their careers.
19. Make sure students know why they need to learn the lesson you’re teaching.
20. Ask students to write about important aspects of their lives (e.g., journals).
21. Have students apply subject matter to solve real-life problems. Use current events that relate to course content. Most of them are working – discuss labor issues.

Engage Students with Active Learner-Centered Strategies

22. Use varied methods of presentation and incorporate technology (e.g., blogs, wikis, PowerPoint, video). Don’t lecture for more than 15 minutes at a time.
23. Give students opportunities to interact. See www.oncourseworkshop.com for group work strategies (jigsaw, solo/pair/share/square, etc.)
24. Stage a change-your-mind debate, with students moving to different parts of the classroom to signal change in opinion during the discussion (value line).
25. Conduct a role play or debate on alternative views.
26. Have students write often. Elicit comments and questions about course topics.

Offer Support for Learning

28. Use Early Alert to catch problems early.
29. Use the MyLAVC portal to post your syllabi, assignments, videos, and announcements, and to hold online discussions.
30. Use study questions or study guides and have students create their own.
31. Stress that readiness to learn and coming to class prepared are key components to success in your course.
32. Use repetition -- students should hear, read, or see key material at least three times. Create a podcast so your students can listen to your lecture again and again.
33. Create an environment in which students feel safe asking questions and saying “I don’t understand that.” Require or encourage one-on-one consultations during student drop-in hours or in class.
34. Offer mini-lessons in time management, study skills, note-taking, summarizing, critical reading, finding the main idea, outlining, and plagiarism (click on ‘teaching resources’ at <http://lavc.edu/profdev>). Give students online resources for study skills (see handout on free study skills modules) as well as content with free online tutorials for students (e.g., iTunes University, hippocampus.org, amser.org (science), math sites, youtube.com/education, etc. – see 101 Great Websites)

Provide Feedback and Assess Learning

35. Diagnose deficits early and provide feedback as soon as possible.
36. Reward desirable behavior. Be encouraging.
37. Use non-graded feedback to let students know how they are doing: post answers to quizzes and problems, exercises in class, oral feedback. Use clickers, Quick Thinks, one-minute papers, and Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS).
38. Maintain a grade book with current scores so students can check their progress often. (Use Excel or www.gradekeeper.com)

Create Structure

39. Be prepared with lesson plans for course units (see lesson plan templates). After giving direct instruction, provide opportunities for practice and allow students to demonstrate what they’ve learned.
40. Identify your course learning outcomes and be sure students know what they are expected to be able to do at the end of each lesson and at the end of the course. Provide closure (a recap) at the end of the class session and at the end of the course.

OUR GOAL SHOULD BE TO MAKE OUR STUDENTS LOVE LEARNING!

(Liberally adapted from “101 Things You Can Do in the First Three Weeks of Class” by Joyce Powlacs Lunde, University of Nebraska at Lincoln)

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