

Teaching Inclusively: Quick Tips & Tricks

The first day of class is extremely important for making the students in your class feel welcome. To help you practice inclusivity in your classroom, we've written a sample "first day script" that you can modify for use in your courses. We've also highlighted important words that will resonate with many of your students, and that your students will appreciate hearing out loud.

"First and most importantly, congratulations! If you are sitting in this room, you have proven yourself to be a smart, hardworking individual capable of learning complicated material and improving your physics skills. The admissions office doesn't make mistakes: you belong at Brown, and you belong in this class. I want you to feel welcome here."

- At this point in the script, introduce yourself in 2-3 sentences. In addition to saying that your research is about X and you have hobby Y, talk about your **identity** (your race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) to the extent that you are comfortable.

"I want to be a **mentor**, not simply a teacher, to all of you. I encourage you to approach me or your TAs when you are struggling with the class material or want to talk about how your identity affects your experience in this class or anything else on your mind."

- Talk about how you struggled with the material in this class or a similar class as an undergraduate.

"Many of you in this class have experienced or will experience **imposter syndrome**. Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you don't really deserve to be here, and that eventually a low test score, an incorrect response to a question in class, or something else will 'expose' you. **Marginalized** students such as people of color, women, first-generation and low-income students, and students with disabilities, are more likely to experience imposter syndrome. If you feel like an imposter now, please let me reaffirm that you do belong here. You are not an imposter. I or the TAs would be happy to talk to you about your experiences with imposter syndrome at any time."

- Set up the environment you want in your classroom

"I want to establish that this class is a welcoming environment to everyone, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or religious identity. The university and I do not tolerate discrimination. Please feel comfortable coming to me or a university administrator if at any point you ever feel uncomfortable for any reason."

- Introduce your TA staff to make them more accessible (personal stories from the TA staff are a great way to humanize them!)

Encourage your TA staff to introduce themselves in a welcoming way to make themselves resources for the students for the material as well as broader questions about succeeding in the field and navigating college.

Example intros: name, personal pronouns, year, concentration, hometown, favorite part of the course or fun fact

- Build the community and encourage students to pursue your field

Explicitly state the purpose of the class is to build community, not weed students out

Encourage students to form study groups!

Have students introduce themselves to their neighbors

- Explain the collaboration policy in terms of what you can do, NOT what you can't do

Good example: Form study groups, work together on ideation, individually write up answers

Bad example: Don't copy each other's homework, no writing up answers together

- Go through your typical syllabus!

- End with **real-world applications**

Show why students should be excited about your class

If there are other, parallel intro courses - describe them! Suggest why some students might be interested in taking them.

On this page, we suggest longer-term methods you can use to make your classroom more inclusive. The more you use these techniques, the more comfortable your students will feel!

Be mindful of using inclusive language; this includes using the terms 'you all' and 'first years' instead of the gendered 'you guys' and 'freshmen' and using gender inclusive pronouns such as 'they/them/theirs'

Be cognizant that when you refer to scientists or other specialized members of your field to not default to male pronouns; this applies to writing exam and homework questions as well

Explicitly highlight the important contributions of members of marginalized identities that are relevant to the course material (and maybe include examples of others you feel important to share!)

In your interactions with individual students, be mindful of what specific privileges you may have that they do not share and adjust the way you interact with them accordingly

Be very mindful of any jokes or any attempts at humor you may make during class; ask yourself what aspects you find funny and how you imagine the comment will add to the overall environment of the class

Continually emphasize that while the course material is difficult, it's purpose is to challenge the students to think critically about the topics, not just to get a certain grade distribution

Periodically remind the class that everyone deserves to be in it, and make yourself available for those who feel overwhelmed to reach out to you

Do not be dismissive of questions and treat all students with respect (in the same manner of how you hope they will address you)

Remind the TA's to follow similar protocols

Brown is an academically challenging institution with many students far away from home; stress creeps up on even the best of students, and sometimes sudden unexpected stressors pop up in life. Imposter syndrome, depression, anxiety, as well as identity struggles and acceptance are very real concerns that affect many students in the Brown community. It is important to remember that any student can be thrown off, and students struggling with mental health problems may face an even greater burden.

Talking about stress and mental health openly and honestly reduces the stigma around mental health: you are helping to break down many of the barriers for student-professor interactions and relationships. This will allow students to feel more comfortable coming to you for additional help, and allow you to foster mentorships with students.

Share some of the ways you deal with stressors in your academic/ personal life and how you practice self care to continuously keep yourself balanced.

Please remind students that "Stress is something that affects everyone, and what is most important is the response to stressors in our lives: practicing good self care, talking to a support system of friends/family, seeking out other resources such as Health Services, CAPs, the office of the chaplain, Project Lets, and Peer Mental Health Advocates."

Professors and TAs may not know about the details of all of these resources, and that is alright-- what they should know is that these resources exist, and they should be able to direct students to these resources if a student comes forward seeking help.

Print out copies of this page to hand out on the first day:

<https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/counseling-and-psychological-services/resources-and-self-help/brown-campus-resources>