

## STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING & REMEMBERING STUDENTS' NAMES

The importance of remembering a person's name is poignantly articulated by Dale Carnegie in his classic book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*: "We should be aware of the *magic* contained in a name and realize that this single item is wholly and completely owned by the person with whom we are dealing and nobody else. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language" (1936, p. 83). Learning the names of your students as quickly as possible is an effective way to establish early instructor-student rapport and to lay the foundation for a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable interacting with their instructor and becoming actively involved in class. Listed below is a "top ten" list of strategies for the effective and expeditious learning of student names.

1. Review and practice the names of students on your *course roster before the first day of class*. Learning to associate or pair faces and names is expedited if the names are learned prior to learning the faces that are paired (associated) with the names.
2. Ask the office of Students Services or Institutional Technology if you could review *identification photos* of students in your class. This could be done before the course begins, or whenever class rosters are first available from the Registrar. You can use student-identification photos selectively to review only the names and faces of particular students who you're having trouble remembering.
3. Make *shorthand comments* next to student names *when calling roll on the first day of class*. (For example, record memory-triggering comments referring to the student's distinctive physical characteristics or seating location.) Remaining after class for a few minutes to review the comments you made by each student's name is an effective memory-enhancement practice because it capitalizes on short-term visual memory, which can allow you to still recall students' facial features and for the spatial (seating) position they occupied in class. Your visual-spatial memory can be improved further if you request some information from students on the first day (e.g., personal information sheet) and collect their responses *in the same order in which they are seating* in class. Moreover, this quick post-class review tends to combat the "forgetting curve" at a time when most memory loss tends to occur—during the first 20-30 minutes after new information has been processed.
3. Take a *photograph* of the class and have students sign their names by (or on) their respective faces. Use this as a record to review or rehearse student names until you have mastered them without having to resort to the photos.
4. Ask students introduce themselves, and have this class session *videotaped* so that you can review or rehearse students' names and faces outside of class time.
5. Ask students if they would be willing to share with you a *photocopy* of the picture on their student identification card or driver's license and use these pictures to help you associate names with faces.
6. Use short *icebreaker* activities to help you learn student names and to help students learn the names of their classmates. For example, "paired interviews" may be used in which two students interview each other and then report the other's autobiographical information to the whole class. Another effective icebreaker is the "name game" strategy whereby students sit in a circle or horseshoe arrangement and say their name preceded by an adjective that begins with the first letter of their name and describes something about their personality (e.g., "jittery Joe" or "gregarious Gertrude"). In this game, students may say their names and also accompany it by some nonverbal behavior that reflects their personality. After each student's self-introduction, ask the next student to recall the name of the previous student before giving his or her own name.
7. *Rehearse* student names during periods of "dead time" (e.g., as students enter class and take their seats, or as you circulate among students during small-group discussions and exams). During the first week or two of class, come to class early and remain after class while students file out. This will provide you with opportunities to rehearse names, one by one, as students enter and leave the classroom.
8. During the first weeks of the term, frequently assign short *reaction papers* or *minute papers* at the end of class. This practice will enable you to learn the names of students as they come up (one by one) to turn in their papers at the end of class, and at the start of the following class session when they come up to the front of class to pick-up their papers.
9. During the first few weeks of class, schedule *brief, out-of-class conferences* with students so you can meet them and learn their names one at a time. This strategy enhance your ability to learn and remember your students' names because it allows for "distributed" practice, i.e., learning small amounts of information in a series of short separate sessions. For instance, it is easier to associate 21 faces with 21 names if they are learned three per day on seven different days, rather than learning all 21 of them in one day.
10. *Continually refer to students by name* after initially learning their names. For example, always address them by name when you respond to them in class or when you see them on campus. This practice serves not only to reinforce your memory of each student's name, it also repeatedly signals to students that you know them as individuals and are responding to each of them as unique persons. Even better than just knowing students' names is showing them that you know their names by referring to them by name when you interact with them.