TEACHING @ SYDNEY

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Teaching insight: First impressions are vital

Fresh, young and excited faces fill the first lectures of the year. Working with first years is always exciting but often many students are overwhelmed by their first year and become disengaged. Building on a theoretical basis that suggests engagement involves cognitive challenge, operative skills and affective enjoyment (Peralta, Callow, Freebody, & Zhang, 2010), consider some of these ideas for your semester 1 planning:

- First impressions are vital – an encouraging, well organised unit, which makes all the expectations clear makes a huge difference. From explaining how to download unit outlines to where the bookshop is, these experiences can make a big difference to first years.
- Moving from school, tutorials often seem impersonal. Planning a variety of activities, including interactive discussion and input on how to work in a group, can engage students who may just need a little more insider knowledge to help navigate academic life
- Organise a short social event in the first few weeks. Even if not all turn up, the knowledge that the coordinator or faculty want to connect with students creates positive perceptions for students
- Make assessment tasks explicit – setting up your students to succeed sets a tone of support and achievement, rather than competition and isolation. Having a clear rubric, time for questions in tutorials or in online forums supports students to step up to new tasks and challenges with more confidence.

Dr Jon Callow is a Lecturer in English Education K–6, undergraduate and graduate-entry programs, and Program Director, MTeach(Primary).

Peralta, L., Callow, J., Freebody, K., & Zhang, H. (2010). Planning for student engagement in lecture contexts. *Synergy*, *30*, 41-47.

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Phone: +61 2 9351 3725 | **Fax:** +61 2 9351 4331
Level 2, South, Fisher Library (F03), The University of Sydney NSW 2006