


## Tips for the First Day of School

- Write your name and your students' names down. Fast-paced activities like *Toss a Ball* (pg. 27) make it hard to catch people's names.
- Be enthusiastic. Be happy to see your students and happy to get down to work.
- Stack handouts and papers and textbooks. I get to class 10-15 minutes early and make neat stacks of everything in the order I will need them in.
- Bring back up for any technology. Don't depend on the projector absolutely working, especially on day one when the IT guy is busy doing his own first day tasks.
- Give students an overview of what they are going to be learning in your class, whether it be a syllabus or a chance to flip through the book. Focus on how they will grow in the end.
- Forget Pinterest, especially if you're a new teacher. Little is going to be picture-perfect on day one and in fact there's reason to believe students learn better when things go a little awry.
- There's an old teacher adage, "Don't smile until Christmas." Research shows that students study better when they like the teacher, and when they feel the teacher likes them. So don't be afraid to smile and be kind. Set the tone of your classroom as a comfortable place to study.
- On the other hand, don't be a pushover. Be strict as well as kind. It's much harder to enforce a rule later on that you were lax about at the beginning.
- Be particularly strict about any shows of disrespect to other students. That helps make the students feel comfortable.
- Remember, icebreakers like Memory Chain have students revealing facts about themselves. Make sure no one is being made fun of for something they revealed to the class.
- Students are more likely to comply with rules if they feel they have had a say in the rule-setting process. Get them involved with an activity like *Classroom Rules Negotiation* (pg. 60)

- Decide whether you want to call students by their formal names or nicknames. If the latter, it's always good to ask "What do you prefer being called?"
- Never let a student feel ashamed about his or her name or native language. Although there is an activity in the book on giving students English names, these are meant to be fun nicknames or code names, and ways of teaching students to play with language. It should be clear that 1) they belong in an English-speaking world and 2) that there is not really any "English " or "non-English" names.
- Don't stress about the first day too much. You already have an awesome activity picked out from *50 Activities for the First Day of School*. Students know you're on the spot and they are forgiving. More forgiving than you will be on yourself.
- Most students want to walk away from the first day feeling that they have learned something, not just had fun all day. Be sure to choose activities that have a purpose beyond fun. Thanks to the wise Penny Ur for this insight.
- It's easy to fit in a quick lesson on a new grammar point or vocabulary item. When students are speaking, pay attention to some of the common errors you hear or places where they could use some new language skills. Then follow-up your icebreaker with a quick lesson that fits those needs.
- Knowing how to manage when things don't go according to plan or when you make a mistake is an important skill for studying and for life. If things do wrong on the first day, turn it into a learning opportunity and show them how well you can do under pressure (I know, easier said than done).



Tired of doing the same icebreaker every September? Are your students fluent in Two Truths and a Lie? Build up your collection of go-to icebreakers and warm-up activities. Check out [alphabetpublishing.xyz/book/first-day-of-school](http://alphabetpublishing.xyz/book/first-day-of-school) for free teacher resources on starting your school year off right. You'll also find more information about *50 Activities for the First Day of School*, a teacher's resource of with icebreakers, warm-ups, and activities for building a classroom community. Author Walton Burns has been teaching ESL and EFL for 15 years and writing materials professionally for almost 10 years ([waltonburns.com](http://waltonburns.com)).