

Resource Guide

Tips for Using Student Names in Large Classes

Learning students' names is a powerful and simple way to promote belonging, build relationships, and foster motivation in the classroom. While it is easier to learn names in smaller classes, it often feels daunting as class sizes grow. Yet even in large courses, using students' names can make a meaningful difference and diminish feelings of anonymity. This guide offers tips for incorporating the use of students' names in your large classes.

- **Start Small:** Start learning names for a smaller subset of students. You can group your learning by rows, tables, or sections in the room. Try to learn a small percentage of the class first (15%) and practice the names by using them as often as possible.
- **Use Name Tents:** Name tents can allow you and other students to readily see and use names during class. You can make these ahead of the first day or ask students to make (and decorate) their own name tent on folded card stock. The name tents can be picked up at the start of class or students can be responsible for bringing it to every class.
- **Ask for Names:** When students speak in class, ask them to share their name with the class. You can then use their name when following up on their ideas or asking other students to respond to "Janet's idea".
- **Encourage Students to Learn Each Other's Names:** Have students do introductions and reminders of names throughout the semester. You can have them complete activities to learn names or pair up with a student they do not know and introduce themselves before working on an assignment.
- **Use Notecards:** You can use notecards with everyone's name on them to call on specific students to answer a question. This not only helps you call students by name but also ensures that the same few students are not answering every prompt.

Resources

Cooper, K. M., Haney, B., Krieg, A., & Brownell, S. E. (2017). What's in a Name? The Importance of Students Perceiving That an Instructor Knows Their Names in a High-Enrollment Biology Classroom. *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 16(1), ar8. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.16-08-0265>

Miller, M. D. (2024). *A Teacher's Guide to Learning Student Names*. University of Oklahoma Press

Davidson, J. (2014, January 24). Activities for Helping Students Learn One Another's Name. *Faculty Focus | Higher Ed Teaching & Learning*.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by email at cttl@slu.edu.