

Magna Minute Mentor

Supplemental Materials

How Can I Learn Student Names?

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How Can I Learn Student Names?

Dr. Ike Shibley

First question: why bother learning student names?

- Dale Carnegie, in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, said, “Remember that a person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”
- Being able to hand work back to students directly signals respect and concern.
- Being able to call on students by name makes discussion in class more likely.
- Students will be more willing to ask questions when you can call on them by name.
- Using names builds trust, makes the course more organized (no random calling on students to answer questions or pick up exams/papers/assignments), and increases the instructor’s rapport with the class.

Second question: how do you learn names?

- Take pictures on the first day.
- Ask students to post pictures on the course management system.
- Ask students to create a mini-biography as a first assignment; they can submit it in person or online.
- Use icebreakers on the first day.
- Ask students to stop by your office to pick up the syllabus and introduce themselves.
- Tell students they must pick up the first exam (or first paper) at your office.
- You could always rely on a seating chart, but this seems somewhat authoritarian for college.
- Learn names while you pass back assignments: lots of low-stakes grading assignments early in a course can help with this.
- Assign students to groups; assign group work; learn names in each group as you interact with students in groups.
- Use memory aids (see next page).

Third question: why do all these techniques seem challenging?

- Because we all struggle with memory; some colleagues will seem to have an easier time with it, but everyone must make learning names a purposeful activity.
- A technique is only as good as the frequency with which you practice using it.
- Learning names requires deliberate practice both in and out of the classroom.
- Try to refrain from ever saying that you are not good at learning names, because you create a self-defeating attitude. With practice, you will be good (and no one learns name without work!).

Some techniques for remembering

- Name Association: When you hear someone's name, try to associate a mental image of another person who has the same or a similar name, such as "She reminds me of Aunt Gladys and her name is Grace."
- Word Association: Sometimes you can associate an image of a similar word, such as "Grace seems quiet" or "Andy sounds like 'candy'" (you might think he's a "sweet" student).
- Physical Features Association: Students have many distinguishing characteristics—particularly memorable clothing, piercings, tattoos, hairstyles—that can help you remember.
- Grouping: If you have three Michaels, remember them all together and then work to distinguish them by first and last name.
- Last Names: Last names can actually help, because you have more information to link to your memory.
- Practice, practice, practice.

Web sites:

<http://www.wikihow.com/Remember-Peoples%27-Names>

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/Advisingissues/Memory.htm>

http://www.wittcom.com/how_to_remember_names.htm

<http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/names.htm>

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/remnames.htm>