Exciting

I had at least one professor who made me feel excited about learning

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Excitement about learning can be transformative. Gallup found that students who had at least one professor who made them excited about learning were 1.5 times more likely to thrive in life after college. That excitement often starts with how a course is introduced, how students are invited into the material, and how curiosity is supported. Here, you'll find small, easy-to-implement, faculty-tested approaches to making learning engaging, meaningful, and personally relevant.

Humanize the Learning Space

Why this matters?

- *Students assume professors are unapproachable or too busy*
- *Large classes can feel anonymous*
- *Some students hesitate to ask for help because they fear looking unprepared.*

Actionable Strategy	How to Implement It	Resources / Examples

I. Welcome Video	Prior to the semester starting, post a welcome message and a brief (1–3 minute) video on the course LMS homepage or send to students to introduce the course and set a positive tone. Or Include a 'Meet Your Professor' section in the LMS or syllabus so students connect a face and story to the name.	Keep videos 1–3 minutes. Informal tone builds more trust than polished production.
II. Use Student Names	For small classes: Use name tents, seating charts, or LMS tools. In large lectures: learn 3–5 common names per class until you have worked through the roster. Small acknowledgments go a long way in helping students feel seen.	In large lectures, learn 3–5 names per class until you have worked through the roster.
III. Share Your Story	Share a brief professional backstory that connects you to the subject. Let students see why the material matters to you and how you arrived at this field. Maintain an encouraging tone in class, especially when students attempt challenging questions. Reinforce effort, reasoning, and growth so the classroom atmosphere feels constructive and energizing.	

IV. Ice-Breaker Activities	At the start of the semester, make a discussion post in which you encourage students to introduce themselves and interact with each other. Consider offering bonus/extra credit points to encourage creativity and engagement.	For small lecture class: Mix & Mingle Bingo; Fishbowl questions. For large lectures, consider starting with a "Get to Know Your Neighbor" activity. Display a few prompts on the screen and encourage students to share with nearby classmates as much or as little as they feel comfortable sharing. Use a discussion board with guided prompts so students have a clear idea of what they can contribute.
V. "Get to Know You" Survey	Administer a survey to students at the beginning of the semester to get their input on ways to make them excited about learning.	Example: Beginning-of-semester student interest survey. I name it **"Get to know you survey"** Use anonymous surveys before class can help the instructor understand students' expectations, concerns, or experiences in advance.

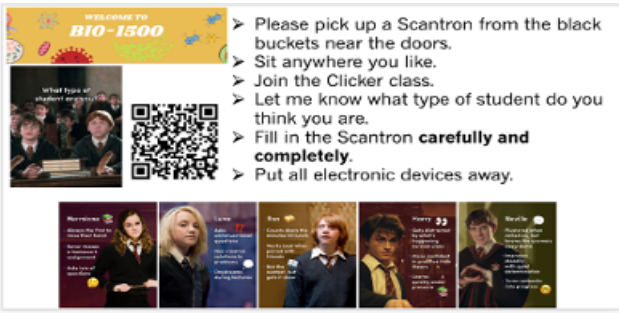
Low Stakes Entry Points

Why this matters?

- *Silence dominates the beginning of class*
- *Energy is low, especially in afternoon or large lectures*

Actionable Strategy	How to Implement It	

I. Warm-up clicker	Start with a quick poll, warm-up question, or short reflection that is ungraded. This helps students	

		
II. Low-Stakes Retrieval Warm-Up	Begin class with 2–4 short recall questions about content from the previous session or assigned reading. Grade them for completion, students earn full credit for attempting, regardless of correctness. Allow students to think and answer individually before revealing correct answers. Follow with a 1-minute class review of the answers. This is not a test, it is a memory activation exercise.	For small classes, students can write answers on paper or answer individually. For large lecture classes; Poll everywhere or Clicker quiz can be used. Clicker quiz option works great for me. ** a think pair share can be modified that works well in all lecture settings. Students can think on their own, discuss their thoughts with their neighbor and then answer clicker quiz. It builds a sense of community, reduce stress of being wrong and strengthens concepts.

III. Pre-Question / Prediction Before Instruction	Before presenting new content, pose a question students cannot yet answer. Ask them to commit to a prediction even a guess in writing or via poll. Then deliver the content. The prediction creates an anticipatory gap that motivates students to discover whether they were right. (very important) After instruction, return to the original question and ask students to revisit their prediction. Discuss what changed in their thinking.	Example questions can be Before we begin, what do you think will happen to a plant kept in complete darkness for a week? Before we discuss the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, what do you think was the single most important factor? Write it down." Clicker short answer can be used to gather responses and revisit them again for discussion.

Establishing Psychological Safety Early

Why does this matter?

- *Students fear judgment from peers*
- *Prior negative academic experiences reduce willingness to participate*
- *High-achieving students may avoid risk to protect grades*

Actionable Strategy	How to Implement It	Resources / Examples
I. Normalize Mistakes	• Explicitly state that mistakes are part of the learning process. • Normalize struggle in challenging courses. • When reviewing incorrect answers, focus on reasoning rather than labeling. • Encourage group discussion before whole-class responses.	Tone matters a lot more than we think. Some students shared that instructors are talking at them not talking to them .Use encouraging tone, some examples can be *"This is a challenging topic, so confusion at this stage is completely normal."* *"If you're struggling with this concept, you're not alone. That's part of learning biology."* *"I'm more interested in how you arrived at your answer than whether it was correct immediately."*

II. Encourage Group Discussion	• Divide large lecture classes into teams/groups. • It promotes collaboration among students. • Build a safety net so students discuss among each other before sharing with class. • Assign roles in each team: facilitator, reporter, scribe. Rotate roles weekly so everyone gets a chance to participate.	I use "Get to know you survey" to make random teams of 3-4 students. Students sit with their teams at least once per week (I have set days). Use positive tone when gathering students' responses and during discussions I often use this phrase "It's okay to change your mind after discussion. That's part of the learning process."

Keeping the Vibe Outside the Classroom

Why does this matter?

- *Instructor feel supportive in class but transactional outside class or in online announcements.*
- *Disorganized LMS pages increase stress and cognitive overload.*
- *Students are unsure how to prepare effectively between classes.*
- *Exam anxiety builds when expectations are unclear outside of lecture time.*

Actionable Strategy	How to Implement It	Resources / Examples

I. Consistent Weekly Structure	Each module follows a predictable format so students know exactly where to find materials, assignments, and support resources. That consistency reduces mental clutter and cognitive overload.	
II. Welcome and Preview Announcements	Post weekly overview messages explaining what the class will focus on and how it connects to prior content. This keeps the tone conversational and forward-looking.	
III. Mid-Semester Evaluations	Collect feedback midway through the semester to check how students are experiencing the course. Use results to adjust pacing, clarify confusing content, and reinforce a supportive tone. Share results with students and explain what can and cannot be changed.	Use either Canvas anonymous surveys or your institution's preferred method for mid-semester feedback. Instructors can also design their own mid-semester survey questions and have students respond anonymously through a clicker quiz or polling system.
IV. Welcoming Student Hours	Explicitly frame student hours as a positive, encouraging space not just for problems but for growth, curiosity, and discussion. Emphasize early in the semester that student hours are safe, welcoming, and meant to help students succeed. Repeat often the importance of student hours	Have student hours time and location on 1st slide of every lecture. Reiterate often that you welcome students during student hours

		Have encouraging tone during student hours

Offer Opportunities for Feedback and Revision

Why does this matter?

- *Students often see grades as final judgments rather than part of a learning process.*
- *Large classes make individualized feedback more difficult to sustain.*
- *Instructors worry about the time required to review revisions.*
- *Some students focus only on point recovery instead of understanding mistakes.*

Actionable Strategy	How to Implement It	Resources / Examples
I. Provide Ample Feedback in Large Classes	Use Think–Pair–Share: students think about the answer, discuss with their group or peer sitting next to them, then share with the class. After taking a few answers, provide your own feedback.	
II. Allow Multiple Attempts on Homework	Allow students to attempt homework questions more than once before the deadline, shifting motivation from performance-avoidance to mastery-approach.	

III. Written Post-Exam Feedback	Provide written feedback after the exam. This is especially beneficial in large lecture classes where individual follow-up is difficult. A brief class-wide debrief normalizes mistakes and prevents misconceptions from hardening.	
IV. Provide Additional Support Resources	Include supplementary videos, articles, and structured materials to help students revisit challenging concepts at their own pace. This creates space for self-correction outside of class time.	

Reflection: Solidifying the Win

Why does this matter?

- *Students rarely pause to recognize how much they have learned across a semester.*
- *Without structured reflection, knowledge stays fragmented rather than integrated.*
- *Metacognitive awareness: knowing what you know and how you learned it is a key predictor of lifelong learning success.*
- *Exit points from a course shape whether students carry insights forward or leave them behind.*

Actionable Strategy	How to Implement It	Resources / Examples

Exit Tickets	At the end of each class, ask students to write down one key takeaway from the class or a question they still have before leaving (face-to-face). This low-stakes prompt helps students consolidate learning and gives the instructor real-time data on class understanding.	Collect on index cards or via LMS poll. Review before next class to address gaps.
Post-Lesson Reflections (PLR)	A brief (~3 question) reflection at the end of each lesson or module. Students assess what they learned, what they found unclear or enjoyable, and what additional support they need before moving on. Helps instructors identify patterns across the class.	Use the same 3 questions every time for consistency: What did you learn? What is still unclear? What do you need more of?
Note to Future Self	Students retrieve and reorganize knowledge by reflecting on what they wish they had known earlier and what is most important to remember later. This promotes metacognition and makes content personal. Flow: (1) Brief introduction — how has the semester shaped you? (2) Acknowledge accomplishments. (3) Offer yourself advice based on lessons learned. (4) Express hopes and aspirations. (5) Close with optimism and encouragement.	Can be submitted privately (not graded for content) or shared voluntarily. Pair with a Key Resource Document for maximum consolidation.
Key Resource Document	Students develop a structured personal document including: course overview, key concepts and definitions, learning resources, real-world connections, and future personal goals. This consolidates learning and serves as a reference the student keeps beyond the course.	Provide a template with section prompts. Can be a final portfolio element.

Start / Stop / Continue Surveys	At the end of a lesson or unit, use this structured feedback approach: What should the instructor start doing? What should they stop? What should they continue? Normalizes two-way feedback and models reflective practice.	
Build a Community of Lifelong Learners	Extend the course's impact beyond the semester. Use peer mentors, former student testimonials, and alumni panels to show students what continued engagement looks like. Let students know they are welcome to return as panelists, guest speakers, peer mentors, or learning assistants.	LinkedIn is a useful resource for maintaining ties with former students.
End-of-Course Awards / Badges	Recognize achievements beyond academic excellence. Develop award categories throughout the semester — e.g., Best Team Player, Most Enthusiastic Leader, Most Creative, Best Questions, Most Helpful, Student's Choice Award.	Face-to-face: printed certificates or trophies. Online: LMS badges or digital certificates.
"Token" to Take With Them	A small, personalized end-of-semester gift that thanks students and marks the milestone. Examples: Women's Health course: compact mirror — "Sometimes you forget you're beautiful, so this is your reminder." Foundational core course: key chain — "May you be proud of the work you do, the person you are, and the difference you make." First-year experience course: a die + notecard with "The Big 6" experiences and a reminder to be intentional — your college journey is not a roll of the dice.	Low cost, high impact. Personalize to course theme.

Simple Closing Survey	"What are two things you learned as a result of this course?" A brief, open-ended close that prompts synthesis and gives the instructor useful feedback for future course iterations.	

2025-26 Contributors

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