Good preparation and organisation are essential for professional teaching. By investing time in preparing to teach a course you will ensure you instruct and present professionally. Our transnational students often hold academic and teaching staff in high esteem and with that esteem comes high expectations. The experience students have in your first class may impact the way these students engage in learning activities throughout the semester.

The first steps are:

- Familiarise yourself with the course objectives, design and content outlined in the Course Guide (Refer to the Transnational Quick Guide – Understanding & Interpreting program and Course Guides).

- Be very clear about the structure, content and assessment requirements of the course, including assessment due dates, so that you can confidently inform students about the course requirements and handle student’s questions.

- Develop a lesson plan for each lesson including the introductory lesson. A well planned introductory lesson is particularly important as it provides you with a framework for future classes. (Refer to the Transnational Quick Guide – Developing lesson plans)

- Consider how you will stimulate and maintain student interest in the course and ensure this is reflected in the first class (Refer to the Transnational Quick Guides relating to student engagement and student centered learning)

Before you commence

Before commencing your teaching assignment, it is important that you become familiar with the course and learning support systems, classroom facilities and your student cohort.

Course information & learning support systems

- Review the course guide.

- Review RMIT’s Student Charter
  http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=tkn8wtd23h84z

- Clarify the standards that are expected of you as an academic staff member Academic & research policies & procedures
  http://www.rmit.edu.au/policies/academic
• Familiarise yourself with Blackboard.
  Learning hub http://www.rmit.edu.au/learninghub for staff access, MyRMIT for student access. Refer to the quick guide Teaching with Technology.

• Familiarise yourself with the learning & teaching resources available to support your students, such as the Learning Lab http://www.dlsweb.rmit.edu.au/lsu.

• Locate the contact details of your course coordinator

Classroom facilities
• Locate the teaching space and the time it will take to arrive.
• Ensure you have the correct keys for the teaching space.
• Familiarise yourself with the room equipment and their use.
• Review the layout of the teaching space and determine its flexibility (this may impact on the activities you have planned).

Student cohort
• Locate the student list.
• Identify the programs students are undertaking.
• Determine the demographics and characteristics of your student cohort i.e. are your students exiting Year 12, mature age, full/part time, articulating from a TAFE program, local or international?
• Clarify the standards you expect from your students.
• Determine the pronunciation of student names.

Your first class
The following suggestions will help build rapport with your students and create a constructive learning environment.

Introduce yourself – briefly tell your students about your background, areas of interest and write your name, email address and phone number on the whiteboard. Let students know when you are available for student consultations. This will help create connections between you, the course and your students.

Introduce the students – If you think that the group has not worked together before, help your students to get to know each other and begin to learn their names. There are many ways that you can do this:

• Ice breaker activities.
• Students can introduce themselves in pairs or small groups.
• Name tags.
• Names written on paper and placed in front of the student.
Clarify roles and expectations – Set the ground rules about:

- Completion of required reading or exercises.
- Class behaviour – respect for each others’ views and backgrounds.
- Importance of active participation.
- Punctuality.
- Preferred ways to communicate with you – phone or email?
- Mobile phone etiquette in class.

Introduce the course – Begin this introduction by explaining:

- The aims and objectives of the course, which are explained in the course guide.
- The relevance of the course to the overall program, discipline or professional field.
- Your own interest in the course or discipline.
- Assessment strategy and assessment procedure, which are explained in the course guide.

Build on students’ knowledge

One principle of good teaching practice is building on your students’ existing knowledge. What do your students bring to this course? Knowing this will assist you to gauge the level of instruction required. The Course Guide will specify the prerequisites for the course which will help you to establish students’ existing knowledge. During your first class ask students to write a few of paragraphs about their experiences or interest in the course or discipline – this activity will also assist you in determining the level of their written communication skills.

Course Coordinator

One of the most helpful things you can do is establish a good working relationship with the Course Coordinator. The Course Coordinator can provide guidance and support if you are unfamiliar with teaching in a new environment.

Useful resources

Support is available from your Deputy Head of School (Learning & Teaching) or equivalent. Your College Academic Development Group or learning & teaching specialist can also provide advice, support and professional development.

RMIT University’s Practical Guides to Teaching will help you to plan and improve your teaching practice: http://www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/practical

Examples of lesson plans by RMIT academic staff:
http://www.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=an6p46dgm7vc
The following sites offer suggestions to welcome your students and draw their attention to effective working relations from the first day of class:

Getting Started - North Carolina State University

9 Things to Do on the First Day of Class - College of Business, Colorado State University
http://www.biz.colostate.edu/mti/tips/pages/9ThingsFirstDayOfClass.aspx

Ice Breaker Activities - Honolulu Community College
http://www2.honolulu.hawaii.edu/facdev/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm#firstday

RMIT’s video series “Perspectives on Learning and Teaching” presents short vignettes about student-centred learning, learner diversity, student engagement and preparing to teach: