

# TECHNIQUE 1

## Learning Names the Right Way

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**What:** Addressing people by name is a fundamental signal of respect. When we take the time to learn other people's names, we indicate our interest in those individuals. Hearing our own name spoken by another alerts our attention and creates an emotional link to the person saying our name. A challenge for teachers is learning the names of their students and pronouncing them correctly—yet this is crucial to our credibility and relationships with students and to students' sense of identity and belonging. Moreover, creative ways of learning students' names afford opportunities to learn more about their lives and their personalities.

**Why:** A person's name is central to their identity. It may be the first word an infant learns to recognize and represents their origins and life story. Some names are more familiar than others, depending on the teacher's own experiences. But as anyone who has a difficult name can attest, hearing your name pronounced incorrectly can be discouraging. Dominique is often mistaken as a woman in written communications and incorrectly addressed as *Dominic* in face-to-face settings. Nancy's

last name is pronounced *fry* but is more commonly incorrectly rhymed with *gray*. As adults, we know how to fix these errors easily, but it is different when you are a child who is being addressed incorrectly by an authority figure. Few students will correct you. Even worse is to have your name dismissed as “too difficult” and to be given a nickname instead. Saying a student’s name correctly is “a powerful fulcrum for harnessing student engagement and motivation in a classroom” (Elwell & Lopez Elwell, 2020, p. 13). Not knowing or being unwilling to use a student’s name contributes negatively to a sense of “otherness” and a belief that the student is not valued in the classroom. In sum, teachers have an obligation to

- learn the names of students,
- learn the story behind their names, and
- learn how to pronounce them correctly.

Teachers may have anywhere from 20 to 200 students each day, depending on their grade level and subject area. Here are some ways to accomplish all three goals and establish an early sense of belonging.

**How:** The first order of business is to learn the names of students. For younger students, you can start the school year by having desks and cubbies labeled with children’s names in order to form immediate associations in your mind. Name tents that have been designed by students are helpful early on for building the habit of using children’s names whenever you address them. If a name is unfamiliar to you, ask the child how to pronounce it correctly. Songs with children’s names in them reinforce the names of each child. Primary educator and instructional coach Claudia Readwright developed a host of name songs that can be used daily to welcome students (see Figure 1.1.).

We have used a silent interview with older students to introduce one another to the class. Each student is given a blank sheet of paper that has been folded into a book. They interview a partner by writing questions to the other person and trading papers to answer the questions. After several minutes, the students introduce their partner to the rest of the class. Once the

**Figure 1.1** Name Songs

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>I Wonder What Your Name Is</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "I Had a Little Turtle"</i></p> <p><i>[Teacher sings]</i></p> <p>I wonder what your name is.</p> <p>I wonder if you know. <i>[Look at the child and make eye contact]</i></p> <p>Your name is _____. <i>[Wait for the child to respond]</i></p> <p>Hello, hello, hello.</p> <p><i>[Continue singing to each child until everyone has said their name]</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>We're Glad to See You Here</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "Farmer in the Dell"</i></p> <p>We're glad to see you here.</p> <p>It gives us joy and cheer.</p> <p>Sure, it's true, we say to you,</p> <p>We're glad to see you here.</p> <p>Claudia is here.</p> <p>She gives us joy and cheer.</p> <p>Sure, it's true, we say to you,</p> <p>We're glad to see you here.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Waving Hello</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow"</i></p> <p>My hands are waving hel-loooo.</p> <p>My hands are waving hel-loooo.</p> <p>My hands are waving hel-loooo.</p> <p>Hello to Claudia!</p> <p><i>[Continue with feet, elbows, head . . .]</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Hello Song</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "Good Night, Ladies"</i></p> <p>Hello, Logan.</p> <p>Hello, Chloe.</p> <p>Hello, Mario.</p> <p>We're glad you're here today.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Where Is _____?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "Are You Sleeping?"</i></p> <p>Where is Claudia?</p> <p>Where is Claudia?</p> <p>Please stand up.</p> <p>Please stand up.</p> <p>Do a little movement.</p> <p>Do a little movement.</p> <p>Now sit down.</p> <p>Now sit down.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Look Who Came to School</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "Mary Had a Little Lamb"</i></p> <p>Look who came to school today,</p> <p>School today, school today.</p> <p>Look who came to school today,</p> <p>Our friend, Claudia!</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Clap a Friend's Name</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "London Bridge"</i></p> <p>Clap a friend's name with me,</p> <p>Name with me, name with me.</p> <p>Let's clap Claudia!</p> <p><i>[Variations: pat, stomp, snap]</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Glad I Came to School</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tune: "Farmer in the Dell"</i></p> <p>I'm glad I came to school.</p> <p>I'm glad I came to school.</p> <p>With the other boys and girls,</p> <p>I'm glad I came to school.</p> <p>Claudia is here.</p>

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	<p>Logan is here.</p> <p>With the other boys and girls, I'm glad I came to school.</p>
<p><b>What Is Your Name?</b></p> <p><i>Tune: "Are You Sleeping?"</i></p> <p>What is your name? What is your name? My name's Claudia. My name's Nancy. It is nice to meet you. It is nice to meet you. Let's be friends. Let's be friends.</p>	<p><b>Hey, Children!</b></p> <p><i>Tune: "He's Got the Whole World"</i></p> <p>Hey, children! Who's the town? Everybody stop and look around! Say your name and when you do, We will say it back to you! Claudia! Claudia!</p>
<p><b>Here Today Song</b></p> <p><i>Tune: "If You're Happy and You Know It"</i></p> <p>Claudia's here today, shout hurray! Claudia's here today, shout hurray! Claudia's here today; She will learn and laugh and play. Oh, Claudia's here today, shout hurray!</p>	<p><b>Say Your Name</b></p> <p><i>Tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star"</i></p> <p>Say your name, And when you do, We will say it back to you.</p>
<p><b>Where, Oh Where?</b></p> <p><i>Tune: "1 Little, 2 Little, 3 Little . . ."</i></p> <p>We're glad to see you here. Where, oh where is our friend Claudia? It gives us joy and cheer. Where, oh where is our friend Claudia? Sure, it's true, we say to you, Where, oh where is our friend Claudia? We're glad to see you here. She's wearing stripes today! Claudia is here.</p> <p><i>[Adapt the description for each child—for example: She's wearing red today! . . .]</i></p>	

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activity is completed, students decorate their own interview booklet with their name on the front page and display it on a bulletin board with the others from the class.

Another technique for older students is to invite them to write a short essay about themselves, including such details as their character traits, aspirations, and biography. Students then convert their essay into a word cloud, choosing fonts, colors, and designs that are pleasing to them. After students share information about themselves with the class, their word clouds can be displayed virtually using the learning management system for the class. Make sure you participate, too, so that your students can learn about you.

Go deeper with students of any age by learning about the story behind their name. We tell stories about how we got our names, which invites a bit of family lore into the classroom and lets students ponder the seemingly impossible notion that we were once babies ourselves. Teachers can also broach the subject of pronunciation by reading a short story such as “My Name” by Sandra Cisneros (1991) or the opening paragraphs from the novel *My Name Is Not Easy*, a National Book Award finalist about an Inuit teenager who goes by Luke because it’s easier for others (Edwardson, 2013). After modeling, we ask students to tell or write about how they got their names. Some may talk about being named after an ancestor or family friend, while others may offer the translated meaning of their name. As students tell the story of their names, we ask them about their preferred names, and if we aren’t adept at pronouncing a name correctly, we ask the student to coach us. Doug asks his students not to let him off the hook and practices each day with them until he is able to say their names correctly.

Learning students’ names, their stories, and the correct pronunciation is a crucial first step in creating a classroom climate that is culturally responsive and culturally sustaining. Your efforts will not go unnoticed, as your students will remember the time and effort you have invested in getting to know them.