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The First Hour: the power of beginnings in teaching

In a simple experiment showing the power of first impressions, Dr George Bach had college students briefly meet others they would be sharing their time with at college. The students were asked to write down their first impressions. Months later, once they knew those people well, the students were asked to write down their current impressions of those same people. Two thirds of the information in the final comments was also present in the first comments (1970, p.173). The first contact shapes the rest of a relationship.

Take this article as an example. Are you going to carry on reading and find out how the skilled use of *the first hour* with a group can maximise the effectiveness of your teaching skills? If you do, it probably has a lot to do with how you feel about what you're reading now. We've written an article that we believe can save you time, make life easier, and deliver clear and practical benefits for the success of your trainings. But these first lines may count for as much as two thirds of the impression you gain of the value of learning this.

The same thing happens in your classes or seminars. Those groups that you really enjoy teaching were often a pleasure from the start. And occasionally you come across a group where you have the sense that you "got off on the wrong foot." This is an article about how to design beginnings that create cohesive and cooperative groups, while focusing participants' attention on the content you want them to learn. The specific techniques we'll cover are summarised in the chart shown on the following page.

A K Fink (1962) notes that learning groups go through a process he calls Warmup, as they access states useful for learning. Warmup is a concept which evolved within the field of Psychodrama, but it has applications in most disciplines. Cars don't start very well in fourth