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## And Finally ... What's in a Name?

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# What's in a Name?

**Michael Simonson**

*A person's name, to him or her, is the sweetest sound in any language.*

—Dale Carnegie

“Call me Ishmael” is the first line of the classic novel, *Moby Dick*. Most high school students do not realize the importance of Ishmael's name when they start reading. However, if they wanted an A on the final essay they wrote about the novel, they should have mentioned how this first line of three words set the intellectual tone for Herman Melville's masterpiece.

Today, names have emerged as critically important aspects of teaching. In the world of mask wearing, social distanced class-

rooms, and blended teaching formats, the names of students have become one of the most unifying aspects of the educational experience.

Names promote a sense of accountability. Using a student's name recognizes them as important, that they exist, and to a certain extent that you care. Community building in the distance education classroom is much more difficult, probably impossible, without the use of names, which also produce a sense of positive behavior by students. When an instructor uses a student's name empathy is increased.

Remembering names is a problem for most—except for those rare individuals who seem to always know someone's name. Instructors can improve their name-use by:

- Having a class roster, possibly even a seating chart
- Visualizing names by associating them with a picture of the student
- Paring students so they introduce one another—they learn names and the instructor does, also
- Saying names in class.

When instructors are teaching distant learners, or often both local and distant learners, what are some tips for use of names.

1. Videoconferencing systems such as Zoom display names of distant stu-

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- dents, so in order to equalize naming, have local students create name tents.
2. Proper student names should be used, nicknames that can be problematic (e.g., first and last names).
  3. Difficult names to pronounce or remember could be hard to use, so instructors should negotiate with students.
  4. First name use is friendly, but for adult students first names might be too “personal.”

What about the instructor? What should students call you? It is widely reported by students that they really wonder what to call their teacher, trainer, instructor, or professor.

The best answer is to tell them what to call you. Do not be modest. Tell them! After all, Ishmael told us what to call him. For example:

- Mr.;
- Ms. (use of Mrs. or Miss—may be okay but check with the person first);
- Dr.; or
- professor.

Establishing name protocols is a good idea. The first day or class, or in the course syllabus establish the rules for names.

1. *Student Classroom Name.* What local and distance students should use as their videoconference name and the name on their classroom name tent.
2. *Video Enabled.* The distant learner should be required to have their video camera on during the entire class? Instructors can see the local students, so distant students should be seen also.
3. *Dial-In Students.* Is dialing in with a cell phone acceptable? If so, when? If not, what should they do if they are “on the road”?
4. *Instructor’s Name.* What name should students use when referring to you.

*And finally, as Shakespeare wrote, “to which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet.”*