



## Tips for Learning Student Information

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Memorizing the names and backgrounds of 90 people (180 if you have two sections) and then matching that information with the actual faces may seem like an overwhelming task for a new professor. However, the investment is paid back in many ways, including enhanced credibility, improved case discussions, and a more personal student-professor relationship. In addition, knowing student backgrounds may prevent serious oversights, such as ignoring a student with personal experience or family connections to the firm or in the industry being discussed. Finally, memorization of names and backgrounds can increase your comfort level with a new section. Student information is one of the few “knowns” during the first case discussion, and to have it memorized is to have at least one thing under control.

The process of committing this information to memory differs instructor to instructor. Listed below are some techniques employed by members of the HBS faculty.

- Start early.
- Group class card into stack of five, thumb through them and quickly repeat key facts. Then use cards like flashcards, combining stacks as you go along.
- Use the audio feature on the electronic class cards to familiarize yourself with the correct pronunciation of student names.
- Group students you are most likely to confuse, with particular attention to those who might be most sensitive to a mix-up. Work to identify subtle differences that will help you differentiate among students:
  - Whose ethnicity or nationality is unfamiliar to you.
  - With the same name, or similar names (particularly first names).
  - With similar backgrounds (e.g. white males in consulting or finance).
- Use stories, personal connections, or association tricks to peg information into memory.
- Study the seating chart to help with differentiation and to “nail it down.”
- Use a yellow marker on class card printouts to highlight:
  - Course/case-specific information.
  - Unique information (to learn by exception).
  - HBS connections.
- Create lists of useful sub-groups (e.g., financial experience, energy industry, engineers) that relate to upcoming cases. The electronic search feature can be helpful for generating such groupings.
- If absolutely impossible to memorize everything before the first meeting, concentrate on smaller groups for each class session and expand day-by-day.
- Expect a reconciliation period after classes start while matching pictures to actual faces.
- Revisit the cards at least once a week so the learning process continues.