



Active Learning Activities for the Classroom

STARTING A NEW TOPIC

Preconception / Misconception Check	Focus is on uncovering prior knowledge or beliefs that hinder or block new learning; can be designed to uncover incorrect or incomplete knowledge, attitudes, or values.
Two Column Method	A discussion leader helps participants more fully consider a problem, issue, or concept by employing a two-column method of generating and recording responses to a prompt.
Learning Journal	Students are asked to reflect in writing about the learning experiences they have undergone. They are encouraged to become conscious, through language, of what is happening to them. A widely used technique in this regard is a learning journal, a reflective log or diary students keep over time.

SYNTHESIZING INFORMATION

One Sentence Summary	Students answer the questions “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” about a given topic and then creates a single informative, grammatical, and long summary sentence.
Concept Maps	Students draw or diagram the mental connections they make between major concepts or other concepts they have learned.
Jigsaw	A general topic is divided into smaller, interrelated pieces; each member of a team is assigned to become an expert on (or read about) a single part. Members come back together to teach the other members their part of the topic.
Paired Annotations	Students read and take notes then pair with another student who read the same piece. In this pair, students discuss main ideas, discuss divergent and convergent thinking, and submit a composite annotation that summarizes the group ideas.
Presentations / Poster Session	An excellent way to inform students quickly, capture their imaginations, and invite an exchange of ideas among them. A graphic way of enabling students to express their perceptions and feelings about a topic you are currently discussing in a nonthreatening environment.
Role Playing	Students are given a situation and a role to play of a character in the situation. Without practice, they act out the events in the situation.
Generating Test Questions	Students generate test questions and model answers for critical areas of learning.
Imagine	Through visual imagery, students create their own ideas. This can be effective as a creative supplement to collaborative learning. It can also serve as a spring board to an independent project that may initially seem overwhelming to students.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Create Scenarios / Simulations	This presents cases, problems, scenarios, etc. in which the students must role play. A critical situation is discussed and analyzed and decisions are made about how to resolve the situation.
Case Study	These are real world descriptions of problems with all accompanying data. Groups are asked to resolve the problem within a given period of time. Each group makes recommendations while the instructor acts as moderator.
Pyramiding / Snowball Groups	Given a problem, students first work alone, then in pairs, and finally in foursomes and compare, refine, and revise their conclusions/recommendations.



CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Focused Listening	Focuses students' attention on a single important term, name, or concept from a lesson or class session and directs students to list ideas related to the "focus."
Memory Matrix	Students complete a table about course content in which row and column headings are complete but cells are empty.
Muddiest Point	Considered by many as the simplest assessment, students respond to one question (What was the muddiest point in ____?); well suited to large, lower division courses but not to those which emphasize integration, synthesis and evaluation.
Think, Pair, Share	Students turn to someone near them to summarize what they're learning, to answer a question posed, or to consider how and why and when they might apply a concept.
Student Response Systems / Polling	Short, self-grading assessments not completed for an accuracy grade. Answers (and distribution of student answers) are provided to the students after completing the poll.

ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THINKING

Structured Controversy	Structured controversy is a systematic, and sequential method for stimulating critical and creative thinking, promoting student collaboration, and ensuring that students view an event or problem from multiple perspectives.
Peer Review	Students review and comment on materials written by their classmates.
Reciprocal Peer Questioning	Instructor provides question stems such as Describe...in your own words, What does...mean, How are...and...similar, Explain why...and how..., etc. Students then develop specific questions from the given stems and provide answers.
In The News	An interesting way to get students involved and arouse their interest in the topic even before they attend the class. This approach will also result in a wealth of material and information that can be shared with all students.

DISCUSSING VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Classroom Opinion Poll	Students indicate degree of agreement or disagreement with a statement or prompt.
Corners	Questions are placed in each corner of the room and students split into groups. Groups go to corners and come to consensus on an answer and respond directly on the paper. Groups rotate and revise, expand, illustrate the response with additional information.
Gallery Of Learning	This activity is a way to assess and celebrate what students have learned over a course of study.
The Silent Question	Students respond to the prompt "A question I still have about this topic but have been afraid to ask is..." Instructor then addresses questions if time permits, or at the next class.

References

- Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Silberman, M. L. (1996). *Active learning: 101 strategies to teach any subject*. Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster Company.