Active Learning Strategies: Reflecting on Your Practice

Active learning can be implemented at varying levels of complexity. Use this worksheet to identify which techniques you may already be using, and the techniques you are open to incorporating into your practice. We have grouped the strategies by complexity so that you can be more aware of resources needed to implement active learning in your courses.

* Low complexity techniques involve building time into existing lecture or exercise content for students to reflect and process the information as they’re receiving it, like think-pair-share partner activities, or muddiest point reflections.
* Medium complexity techniques build on the idea of including reflection and processing time during information-heavy class segments, but may require pre-planning, like a previous knowledge inventory prepared before class and distributed, or technology, like polling or Office365 Docs.
* High complexity techniques often stand in for more traditional lecture and evaluation models, and thus require more prep work and forethought than some of the other techniques. However, these types of assignments can be integrated into existing classes - consider replacing one or two lectures with case-study based group work, or change a capstone assignment from a traditional research paper to a problem-based learning long term project.

Use the codes below to mark your selections in the columns for current practice (“cp”) or interest in using (“int”). Use the two additional rows under each level of complexity to add an additional active learning strategy that you currently use or would like to use in your course design.

Y = I use this in my teaching

~ = I sort of use this in my teaching

N = I do not use this in my teaching

\* = I would like to try this, though I may need more information or resources

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| **cp** | **int** |  |
|  |  | Pause intentionally for 2-3 minutes during lecture and ask students to reflect on what they just learned, then ask if anything needs to be clarified |
|  |  | Have students participate in a brainstorming activity or a concept mapping session |
|  |  | Engage students in small writing tasks during class like the muddiest point or minute paper  |
|  |  | Have students think individually and share ideas with a partner, followed by calling on a few of the groups to report out (think-pair-share) |
|  |  | Have students engage in in-class reading activities that are followed by a class discussion |
|  |  | Have students watch a short video or several video clips and discuss themes or issues in small or large groups |
|  |  | Pause throughout the class to have students contribute to a collaborative note-taking document (where students can consolidate their notes and highlight ideas students might have missed or misunderstood)  |
|  |  | Provide a resource with intentional mistakes or misleading writing and have students work together in class to identify mistakes or areas that need clarification/correction |
|  |  | Concept sorting or sequencing (have students group together and arrange information into appropriate groups, such as core beliefs of related theories, common methods for data collection based on methodology, or authors in their fields of study/expertise) |
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| **cp** | **int** |  |
|  |  | Have students write one idea on a post-it note about a question, then have the class sort the questions into categories, and discuss the categories  |
|  |  | Have students peer-review a paper or assignment and give each other feedback |
|  |  | Engage students in a fishbowl activity (i.e., some students sitting in a circle ask questions, present opinions, and share information and other students outside the circle listen carefully to the ideas presented and pay attention to process. Then the roles reverse.) |
|  |  | Have students do paired annotations (e.g., students pair up to review/learn same article, chapter or content area and exchange double-entry journals for reading and reflection.) |
|  |  | Engage students in active review (e.g., discuss and review material, or potential solutions to problems) |
|  |  | Engage students in guided reciprocal peer questioning activity (e.g., generate discussion among student groups about a specific topic or content area) |
|  |  | Have students take a short, ungraded quiz to check student comprehension of material; this might include open-ended questions where students define or describe concepts in their own words, so that you can address how students are making meaning. |
|  |  | Engage students in self-reflection individually or small groups (e.g., use a self-assessment inventory) |
|  |  | Have students work in pairs, triads, or small groups on class assignments (guide students in how to effectively work together; do not assume they will know where to start) |
|  |  | Have students answer questions by using polling tools (e.g. clickers, Zoom polling, Kahoot, poll everywhere) to check student understanding  |
|  |  | Have students develop information guides across courses about the discipline, to contribute to a living academic program guide for students across cohorts to engage with (e.g. topics of interest, articles they have found interesting in their research, tips and tricks they have picked up) |
|  |  | Have students generate reading questions that future students in a program can engage with for a course reading |
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| **cp** | **int** |  |
|  |  | Have students in small groups work cooperatively on a task (e.g., do a jigsaw activity) |
|  |  | Engage students in inquiry-based learning (i.e., distribute pertinent information and give students the flexibility to formulate their own problem instead of merely asking students to replicate) |
|  |  | Engage students in case-based learning (e.g., (1) ask students to read and discuss complex, real-life scenarios that call on their analytical skills and decision-making or (2) have students conduct coding analysis of qualitative data as a multi-coder team to practice intercoder reliability and team codebook creation) |
|  |  | Engage students in problem-based learning (e.g. frame the problem as a term-long investigation permitting students to develop and enhance investigative, procedural, and communication skills). |
|  |  | Have students engage in role-play exercises or simulations |
|  |  | Have students moderate discussions, develop activities, and/or peer lead instruction for their peers based on readings, concepts, or research interests – actively engage them in the instructional activities of the course. |
|  |  | Engage students in real-world problems or situations (e.g., identify issues/problems on or off campus, proposing possible solutions, work with the community to improve situations or solve problems) |
|  |  | Engage students in reflective dialogue and activities using forum theater and similar methods  |
|  |  | Have students curate an event or public forum where they present on information or host community discussions about the concepts they are learning |
|  |  | Fieldtrips! Have students engage with their local community though field research (e.g. investigating course concepts in specific settings, museums, or at certain events) to make connections between classroom discussion and their lived experience. (This can also be done digitally). |
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Reference: Adapted from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at University of Michigan, which adapted some content from Linse & Weinstein, Shreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, Penn State, 2015.