

Designing In-Class Activities: Examples of Active Learning Activities

A workshop from the University of Pittsburgh's
University Center for Teaching & Learning



Activities for Lectures

- **Structured Notes:** A Detailed outline of the presentation with key words or phrases left out. Students fill these in as the lecture progresses.
- **Labeling a Diagram:** Each student is given an unlabeled diagram or picture which the student labels as the information is given during class.
- **Word Pictures:** Use during lecture to graphically convey ideas and concepts. These require students to fill in words or phrases.
- **Exemplifying:** Students are asked to describe examples and non-examples given a concept, problem, situation, or principle.
- **Incomplete Statements:** Students are given incomplete statements by the instructor and asked to complete them.
- **Three Points Summary:** Students are asked to summarize the three most important points of a lecture.
- **Paraphrases:** Students summarize in their own words what the instructor says.
- **Guest Speaker:** A presentation is given by a known expert followed by questions from the students.
- **Presentation with Listening Teams:** A lecture followed by an organized question/answer/discussion period. Before the presentation, students are organized into small groups and each group is given a listening assignment, e.g., listen for a point that can be applied to a particular situation, etc. At the end of the presentation, each group makes comments and asks questions related to their particular assignment.

Individual Activities

- **Individual Exercises:** These provide an opportunity for the students to practice skills. This could include labeling, rank ordering, multiple choice, problem solving, or true/false and completion. Exercises must be completed in a set time period and the instructor gives and discusses the correct answers.
- **Role Play:** 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. Role play may be used for the purpose of situation analysis or to provide feedback to the students about their own behavior.
- **Questioning Strategies:** Questions which the students will be asked are planned by the instructor prior to the lecture. Each question is written out and is related to a learning objective. In case of no response or incorrect responses, the instructor will also be prepared to ask easier or lower learning level questions which will lead the student to answer the original question.
- **Personal Vignette:** Given a topic or learning objective, the students are asked to relate it to their real experiences (personal or professional) by telling a brief story about it.
- **Progress Quizzes:** Short self-tests which are not graded. Answers are provided to the students after completing the quiz.

Group Activities

- **Buzz/Brainstorm Sessions:** A small group of students work within a determined time limit to answer a question or solve a problem and come to a conclusion.
- **Group Work Exercise:** Students are given a problem or situation to solve in a 5 – 10 minute period of time. All directions and rules are printed in a visual and explained by the instructor.
- **Rank and Report:** Given a series of items or issues, students rank the importance of the items or issues and report the results with a justification.

Group Activities (continued)

- **Problems:** A group of students works on given problems within a specified time. The instructor discusses the correct answers at the end of the activity.
- **Complete Case Studies:** 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.
- **Diagnostic Sessions:** Groups diagnose a problem, situation, process, etc.
- **Pyramiding (Snowball Groups):** Given a problem, students first work alone, then in pairs, and finally in foursomes (maximum) and compare, refine, and revise their conclusions and recommendations.

Activities to Promote Class Discussion

- **Controlled Discussion:** This is used after a lecture. Students ask questions and make comments while the instructor controls the process which goes on for a prescribed period of time.
- **Choices:** Given data on an event and several choices, students are asked to discuss all choices. They may select a choice, justify it, and give the consequences.
- **Debate:** This is an organized and civil argument moderated by the instructor.
- **Discussion of Handouts:** These are special documents, reports, pictures, etc. that are discussed.
- **Modeling:** Students are shown an ideal product, situation or person. Through questioning and discussion, they are able to explain why this is a "model" of what it is.
- **Simulation:** 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.
- **Read and Discuss:** This is a short reading followed by a discussion.

Activities to End a Class

- **Active Review:** After the instructor summarizes the class, students spend two-three minutes quietly thinking or reading through their notes to identify any points of confusion. They clarify any points of confusion by asking questions of one another and the instructor.
- **The Silent Question:** The instructor asks students to respond to the following question: "A question I still have about this topic but have been afraid to ask is..." Students write their questions on a sheet of paper and the instructor addresses questions then if time permits, or at the next class.