

**Engaged Learning Resources
Faculty Development Center
Webster University**

Active Learning Methods to Engage Your Students:

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| Think-Pair-Share | Ask a question or display a problem, give your students a few minutes to think and write about it on their own, then have them pair up to briefly talk about their responses. You can then use the question or problem as a jumping-off point for a class-wide discussion. You may find that students are more likely to speak up after thinking through the question alone and talking it through with a peer. |
| The One-Minute Paper | Have your students take one or two minutes to respond in writing to questions about their understanding of the course content. At the beginning of a class, you might ask, “What was the most important thing you learned from the reading assigned for homework?” and “What questions do you still have?” You can then use their responses to prompt a group or full-class discussion. At the end of a class, you might ask, “What was the most important thing you learned in class today?” and “What questions do you still have?” Your students’ responses will help them to summarize the main take-away points from readings and discussions, and to become more self-reflective about what they are learning. You should read their responses before the next class session and adapt your teaching strategies to further clarify their questions. |
| Jigsaw | Break your class into small groups. Each group then tackles a different topic, reading, or problem, becoming the “experts” on their area. After the “expert” groups have been given sufficient time to discuss their issue or solve their problem, the class forms into <i>different</i> small groups. In this second group, each “expert” provides a summary report on what their “expert” group discussed, or explains how they solved their problem. This “jigsaw” method allows students to teach each other material and requires that students rely heavily on one another, thereby increasing student agency, engagement, and meaningful participation. |
| Speed-Friending | Ask your students to form two lines facing each other, or to move their chairs or desks to form two lines. Each student then pairs up with the person facing him or her, and takes about two minutes to respond to a question or problem you pose. After two minutes, one row stays seated, but the other row moves down one person so that new pairs of students are formed. These new pairs respond to the same question, or you can pose a new question. Continue for at least several new pairings. This method gives students the benefit of working with multiple students, as in group work, but helps guarantee more even participation. |
| Fishbowl Discussion | Have your students move their chairs or desks to form two circles, an inner circle of three to five students, and an outer circle comprising the rest of the class. The students in the inner circle (the “fishbowl”) participate in a discussion while the rest of the class listens and evaluates the discussion in terms of content, participation, and interpersonal interaction. If you feel that your course is suffering from patchy participation when you break your students into groups, this method can help by encouraging students to reflect on their group participation. It can also provide students with models of effective group work. |
| Muddiest Point | At the end of class, have your students spend one or two minutes writing down and turning in a response to the question, “What was the muddiest point in class today?” Student responses will help both you and your students identify areas of difficulty, and at the beginning of the next class, you can report back to your students on the class’s “muddiest points” as a whole. You can clarify confusing content, or try a new teaching strategy if you find that many of your students are |

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| | having the same problem. |
| Role-Playing | Break your class into groups of about four students, and assign each student a different role in the discussion, for instance, if your class is analyzing a reading, you might assign the following generic roles: “Proponent” (supports the author’s points), “Critic” (finds holes in the author’s points and presents dissenting views), “Contextualizer” (places the reading within the context of other readings and within the course content as a whole), and “Real-world Applicator” (explains how the topic might play out in the students’ everyday lives). Alternatively, you can assign your students a case-study or a historical issue, and have them take on the characters of various actors holding a stake in the specific situation. |

For more exercises that promote active learning, collaboration, and student engagement, peruse the following resources. All three are available through the library in print, and *Student engagement techniques* is also available as an electronic resource:

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E., Howell Major, C., & Cross, K. P. (2014). *Collaborative learning techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Assessment Techniques to Gauge Your Students’ Understanding:

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| Exit Slips | In the last five minutes of class, ask your students to write a response to a question such as “What is one thing you learned today?” “What are three ways in which [course concept one] relates to [course concept two]?” “What was the most useful part of class today?” You can generate any questions you like, and use the exit slips to assess everything from your students’ understanding of the course content to whether they enjoyed working in groups to how much time they spent on the reading. |
| Applications Cards | Give each of your students an index card. Invite them to consider an idea or problem you have read or discussed as a class, and to write down one or more ways in which this idea/problem can be applied in the real world (in either their own lives or in society/industry/current events in general). If you like, you can have them share their real-world applications with a partner or in a group, or you can collect them all and summarize them during the next class period. |
| Documented Problems | To assess your students’ problem-solving abilities, present them with a problem, and ask them to write down all of the steps needed to solve the problem along with a detailed explanation of each step involved. |
| Directed Paraphrasing | Ask your students to summarize and paraphrase a course concept for a specific audience (for instance, a friend, a member of a related industry, a review board, etc.). This exercise allows students both to explain the concept in their own words and to think about how it might be applied in various contexts. |
| Concept Map | Select a general course term to use as a starting point, and ask your students to write it in the middle of a piece of paper (or, have them work in groups at a whiteboard or chalkboard). Ask your students to think of other words, concepts, and ideas connected to this central concept, and to graphically represent the connection in any way they’d like. |
| Others | See the active-learning strategies discussed in “Inclusive Learning,” in particular the “One-Minute Paper” and “Muddiest Point.” |

Most of these techniques are drawn from:

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

For the First Day: Using Your Syllabus to Engage Students

Your syllabus provides your students with a roadmap of the semester, and they will look to it for essential information such as course content, exam dates, and assignments. But your syllabus can do more, for both you and your students.

For you, the syllabus can be a powerful tool to help you understand your students’ attitudes, expectations, and experiences surrounding the course, which will help you better reach all of your individual students.

For your students, using the syllabus as a jumping-off point for a discussion or class activity will have multiple benefits: it will allow students to connect the course material to their own lived experience, which will help them understand how the course might advance their professional or educational goals; it will encourage students to be self-reflective about how they approach the material; and it will increase their engagement in the course, thereby deepening their learning. Consider asking your students to look over the syllabus, then facilitating a class discussion addressing some of the following questions. In larger classes, you can break your students into groups to discuss, then follow up with a class-wide debrief.

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| Attitudes | <p>Understanding your students’ attitudes and pre-conceived notions about your area will help you to address the individual students in your classroom. It will also help you to assess potential impediments your students might encounter, both in terms of the course content, but also in terms of their engagement and participation.</p> <p>Some questions you might ask: Why are you taking this course? How would you define [general term related to the course]? How do you think an [instructor’s profession] defines [general term related to the course]? A year from now, how often do you think you will use the skills learned in this course?</p> |
| Expectations | <p>The standard way we understand the syllabus is that it communicates the instructor’s expectations to the students. You can, however, use the syllabus to increase your students’ intrinsic motivation by allowing them to voice their own expectations of the course.</p> <p>Some questions you might ask: What topics, skills, or assignments did you expect to see here? Are you finding those items, or are they missing? Why do you think that might be? What do you find most interesting in the syllabus?</p> |
| Experiences | <p>Learning about your students’ prior experiences related to your course has two major advantages. First, you will learn what skills your students have already developed that might help them in the course (or, conversely, learn that some students might require further support to get up to speed). Second, you and your students may get the chance to learn some personal information about the other members of the class, which can help foster a sense of community.</p> <p>Some questions you might ask: In the past year, how often have you used [skill related to course]? Never, a few times, often, on a daily basis? What is your major/day job? When have you encountered [general course term or concept] in your daily life? Have you had primarily positive experiences in this area, or negative ones? Describe a positive experience you’ve had related to [general course term]. Describe a negative experience you’ve had related to [general course term].</p> |