Active Learning Strategies

Lower Risk Activities

Pause Procedure

• Use three two-minute pauses during the lecture (about every 13 to 18 minutes), give students the chance to clarify, assimilate, and retain the information presented during the prior mini-lecture.

• Example: instructor initiates pause by asking students to turn to their neighbor and summarize the main ideas the instructor has just presented.

Short Writes

Students are asked to write in the last five minutes of class answers to the following:

1. What did you learn in class today? and
2. What questions or concerns do you have?

Summarize last lecture, readings, etc.

• Students are given a reading assignment and asked to summarize it.

• Write main ideas from previous lecture, to tell what they already know about a certain topic before it is presented in class, to explain a particular concept, to summarize the assigned reading, or to generate several questions they think may appear on the next exam.

• In each case, students are paired or grouped to discuss their ideas. When appropriate, student in pairs or groups can generate a new inclusive list or one that selects the five best ideas.

Analytical lists

• Thesis-supported: A statement that provides a clear choice between two opposing viewpoints is given to the students. The general structure of this statement is: “This item does/does not cause this.” The students are asked to take one viewpoint and provide supporting evidence for that perspective.

• Data-provided: Students are given a series of related statements or data and are asked to draw a conclusion.

Journal entries

• Give students time to write a reflection of their learning, up to the point at which they’re at. Give them specific or overarching questions to answers within the entry. They can also use it as a place to write down new questions they have developed.

Thumbs up/thumbs down response to statement

• Pose a question (based on the subject / topic being studied at the time).
Choose a student to say their answer. The instructor calls out "Thumb Up! Thumbs Down!" The rest of the class should put their thumbs UP if they think the answer is correct/agree, and their thumbs DOWN if they think it is incorrect/disagree.

If the answer is correct/ all agree, quickly fire another question at the class. If it is incorrect or some disagree, ask another student for their answer or ask for reasoning.

**Surveys or questionnaires**

- Pose 3-5 questions regarding understanding of material and learning comfort level.
- Have students complete a written or computer based survey to be turned in as an exit ticket.

**Formative (ungraded) quizzes**

- Use at the beginning of a lecture to determine the level of knowledge and whether students completed online assignments.
- Give students five to ten minutes to respond on a blank sheet of paper or online using clickers (depending on the atmosphere in the class, you may keep the quiz anonymous or ask students to put their names on papers). Collect papers and report on responses next time the class meets.
- Variation: Before (or instead of) collecting quiz papers, have students exchange and "grade" each other’s quiz papers based on the answers you present. This grading is to allow students to provide the students with timely feedback, so that they can gauge their understanding and should not be used as a formal assessment.

**Think-Pair-Share**

- With students seated in teams of 4, number them 1-4. Announce a discussion topic or problem to solve. Give students at least 10 seconds of think time to THINK of their own answer. Using student numbers, announce discussion partners. Then stop and have them partner with the other 2 and share the opposite partners answers. (Example: Student #1 and #2, #3 and #4 will be partners) then switch to share (Example: Students #1 partners with #3 sharing #2’s idea then #3 shares #4’s idea while Students #2 and #4 partner sharing #1 and #3’s answer)

**Brainstorming**

- When everyone is gathered, appoint one person to record the ideas that come from the session. Post notes where everyone can see them, such as on flip charts or whiteboards.
- Clearly define the problem that you want to solve, and lay out any criteria that you must meet. Make it clear that that the meeting's objective is to generate as many ideas as possible.
- Students write down as many of their own ideas as they can.
- Encourage everyone to contribute and to develop ideas, discourage anyone from criticizing ideas.
- Move into a whole group discussion sharing their biggest ideas.
Pairs/groups develop an outline of the lecture

- Have students get together to create an outline, the lecture can be done in class or online where the students are combining their notes and creating the outline.

Structured group discussions (specific questions provided)

- Put students into small groups. Provide specific questions for students to discuss. Assign one student to be the recorder. Encourage all to participate.

Higher Risk Activities

Group Discussion (no structure)

- Provide clear expectations of the outcome desired for the group discussion. Have students complete a short assignment individually then use that to guide their discussion, sharing what they have done.

Guided lecture

- Have students get together to share their notes from a lecture. They are then able to make sure they wrote down accurate information and bring up any areas they might not have been clear.

Individual/group presentations

- Provide clear expectations of what the presentations should involve.
- If individual, have students present within a group. If group, have groups present to other groups.
- Encourage viewers to ask questions to the presenter so that dialogue can happen.

Pairs/groups develop applications related to lecture content

- Have students develop a mind map or visual representation of the lecture content. Can be done in small groups or pairs.

Pairs/groups write test questions related to lecture material

- Have students develop 3-5 questions that might be used on the test. Make sure to state expectations and maybe encourage them to mix them amongst the Bloom’s higher order thinking levels or questions types.

Students analyze a problem or situation.

- Have students get in groups to analyze a given problem or situation. Depending on the content, the students can also decide on their problem or situation they want to analyze. Have them turn in document or share a poster of their analysis with the class.

Students work a problem then evaluate each other’s work

- Have students complete a short assignment. Then have students pair up and share their work with another to evaluate whether they have a clear understanding of the material. Encourage dialogue amongst the partners.
Role plays illustrating a concept from lecture

- Have students use visual movements to demonstrate or illustrate their learning.

Responsive lecture

- Students generate open-ended questions for the instructor to answer. The instructor needs to provide clear expectations like having the questions pertain to the unit of study. A recorder can be assigned to share the responses with the students.
- Ideas for question creation: students create individually before class or students partner/group up in class to create questions together.