

Tips for Engaging Students in Learning: Alternatives to Lecture

Contents

Ground Rules.....	2
Wait Time.....	2
Give Me Five.....	2
Provide Positive Reinforcement.....	2
The Rule of Ten and Two.....	3
Think, Pair, Share.....	3
Snowballing.....	3
The 60 Second Buzz.....	3
60-60, 30-30.....	3
Something I Have Learned and Something I Can Use.....	4
Free Write.....	4
The One Minute Paper.....	4
Group Activities.....	4
Preview the Topic.....	5
Begin the Class with a Check- in.....	5
Finding a Partner.....	6
Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down.....	6
Values Line.....	6
How to Kill Your Students with PowerPoint.....	7
Make a Commercial.....	7
What is Bothering You Today?.....	8
Attendance Exercise.....	8
Self-esteem Exercise.....	9

Introduction

Learning is optimized when students are actively engaged in learning. Research on teaching and learning shows that most of us remember:

- 10% of what we read
- 20% of what we hear
- 30% of what we see
- 50% of what we both see and hear
- 70% of what we have discussed with others
- 80% of what we have experienced personally
- 95% of what we teach someone else

The following are a collection of ideas that can be used as alternatives or supplements to lecture in a college classroom. Choose the activities that fit your teaching style and the learning style of the students in your classroom.

Ground Rules

Setting ground rules is a good way to create a safe space for groups. If the group creates the ground rules, they will have ownership over the process (this doesn't mean that you can't suggest rules too!). If you're having problems, bring it back to the ground rules – it's like your safety net ("Hey! What did we agree to in the ground rules?!" or "maybe we need a new ground rule about ____"). Some good basic ground rules are "we won't talk over each other" and "we will respect what other people have to say." Ask group to suggest ground rules and keep track of them.

Joan's note: we discussed the use of ground rules at the workshops on Saturdays and the need to make them meaningful and useful AND how to avoid making it something corny. As in many places, we are fortunate here at McGill in pretty much always having respectful environments. Therefore, you may want to bring up the notion of setting a ground rule to encourage everyone to ask questions and not feel intimidated about asking a question - something like 'there's no stupid question' rule. You may also want to address real issues like acknowledging everyone wants to get a good mark so there is a certain element of competition in the class. However, in the larger picture, everyone usually will agree that it is better if we all do well together than only having some of us do well. Therefore, how about a 'together we can all learn more' rule?

Wait Time

When asking the class a discussion question, be sure to wait for the response. It is a good idea to wait a minimum of six seconds for students to formulate their answers. The silence is uncomfortable for students and it is likely that someone will provide an answer.

Joan's note: after waiting for response and not getting any answers you can repeat the question and ask someone specific for an answer. Use your intuition to choose a good candidate using cues such as facial expression or body language.

Give Me Five

When asking a discussion question, tell the class that you want at least five answers. When the first student provides an answer, say "That was a good start, give me another answer." Continue until you get at least five answers. Make sure to have enough wait time to get responses. This is a good technique to engage more students in the discussion. You can also say, "I would like answers from students who have not had the opportunity to participate yet today."

Provide Positive Reinforcement

Encourage discussion by providing positive reinforcement to all students who participate in the discussion. This can be difficult if you do not like the response, disagree with it or the response provides incorrect information. Be creative in thinking of responses that provide positive reinforcement for participation. Give students in the class the opportunity to correct or add to the information presented. Here are some examples:

- Thank you for your answer. Does anyone want to add to that?
- That's an interesting idea. What do the rest of you think about it?
- That's a controversial topic. Does someone have a different point of view?
- Thanks for getting the discussion going. Let's hear some more ideas.

The Rule of Ten and Two

For every ten minutes of lecture, students should have at least two minutes to talk to each other about what is being presented. Here is an analogy to think about. A college lecture is like a stick of gum. It is only when students chew the gum that they get something out of it. It is important for students to interact with the material in order to retain the information and become engaged in learning.

Think, Pair, Share

Pose a question to the class and ask each student to think about the answer silently for 30 seconds. After 30 seconds, ask students to turn around and ask the person behind them the same question. Let students discuss the issue for about 2 minutes. Then ask for volunteers to share their best ideas. Here is an example:

You have an important assignment that is due soon, but you have been procrastinating and find it difficult to get started. How can you motivate yourself to get started and avoid procrastination?

Snowballing

The instructor begins by posing a question for discussion. The first step is that the student thinks about the answer. Then the student joins with another student and shares the answer. Then the 2 students join with 2 other students and share answers. This group of four can join with another group to have a group of eight.

The 60 Second Buzz

Provide a question for discussion and give 60 seconds for discussion. Share ideas from the 60 second buzz

60-60, 30-30

In this discussion technique, students are asked to find a partner. They decide who is number one and who is number two. Number one must talk about the topic for 60 seconds without stopping. No questions can be asked during this time. Then student number two must talk about the topic for 60 seconds without repeating the ideas discussed by number one. Again no questions are asked. Then student number one responds or adds to the discussion for 30 seconds. Then student number two does the same. The instructor asks for five students to stand and share ideas with the group. The instructor can facilitate the volunteering by circulating around the room and listening in on the

groups. When the instructor hears a good idea, he or she asks the student to report on their ideas at the end of the discussion. This technique also works well for reviewing a topic.

Something I Have Learned and Something I Can Use

Use this activity at the end of class. Have students find a partner for discussion. Have students decide who is number 1 and who is number 2 in the discussion pair. Student number 1 discusses for 30 seconds something they have learned and something they can use. Student number 2 discusses the same question for 30 seconds. Then there is open discussion for one minute. Ask for volunteers to share with the class what they are learned and how they can use it.

Free Write

Introduce a topic by providing a brief lecture, reading a short newspaper article or showing a video. Ask students to write whatever comes to mind in five minutes. At the end of five minutes, ask students to underline their best sentence. Ask for volunteers or call on students to read their best sentence.

The One Minute Paper

Another variation of free writing is the One Minute Paper. It is a one minute written response to a question posed by the instructor. It can be on any topic, but here are some ideas:

- What is one thing that you will remember from class today?
- What was the most surprising idea in today's discussion?
- What was the most useful idea discussed today?
- Would you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
- What was the major objective of today's class?

The One Minute paper can be used at the beginning of class to start a discussion. It can be used in the middle of class to check understanding or get student feedback on key ideas presented in the class. It can be used at the end of the class as a summary activity. Have volunteers read the one minute paper or call on students to read their papers. Instructors can occasionally collect the papers for participation credit or just use them for discussion.

Group Activities

Using group activities can be one of the best ways to involve students in learning. Here are some guidelines for effective groups:

- Give clear directions for the group before students start moving into the groups.
- Set a definite time limit for the group. Most discussion groups should be around 5-7 minutes. Remember the task expands to fit the time available.
- Establish a quota of what is to be accomplished. Challenge the group to come up with 10 ideas in 5-7 minutes.

- Get students into groups quickly and have a method for getting students into groups. There are many ways to get students into groups.
 - Each row is a group
 - Count off as in sports teams
 - Have group assignments for the week, month or semester.
- To get all students involved, make sure every group member has a role to play. Here are some examples of roles:
 - Reporter: Reports best ideas of group.
 - Leader: Keeps the group on task
 - Note Taker: Takes notes
 - Time Keeper: Makes sure the group finishes on time
 - Discussion Leader: Get all members of the group to participate
 - Writer: Writes the best ideas on the board

One problem with groups sharing discussion is that the first group reports on all the best ideas and then the rest have less to say. Use the rapid fire technique for reporting from each of the groups. When groups share information, each group shares one idea and the next group rapidly shares an idea until all ideas are exhausted. In this way, the discussion moves quickly and each group has equal opportunity to share.

Preview the Topic

Briefly introduce a topic for discussion. Divide students into groups (4-5 students per group) and ask them to brainstorm everything they know about the topic. Appoint a recorder and a reporter for each group. The recorder takes notes on the ideas. The reporter shares ideas with the class. Have each group share one idea and then go to another group. Once an idea has been presented, it cannot be repeated by other groups. Alternate groups until there are no more new ideas. This is a great starting point for discussion and provides the background for presenting new ideas. Here is an example:

How should students prepare for a midterm exam in college?

In this example, students would share ideas with the small group. Then reporters would share the best ideas with the class. The instructor would use the discussion as an introduction to the topic of exam preparation and add ideas and a summary to the discussion.

Begin the Class with a Check- in

Spend a couple of minutes at the beginning of the class with one of these questions:

- What is something good that happened to you since the last class?
- What is distracting you from being fully present in class today?
- Do you have any news to share with the class?

Ask for volunteers to answer the question. The Check- in has several good outcomes.

- The instructor gets to know students in the class.
- The atmosphere in the class is more personal. This is motivating for some students.
- The instructor knows about problems that students are facing.

Finding a Partner

When instructors ask students to find a partner for discussion, students often choose the same person each time limiting conversation with other students in the class. For variety, ask students to find a partner based on one of the following ideas:

Find a partner who:

- Was born in the same month as you
- Has the same shoe size
- Has the same major
- Has the same color shirt
- Went to the same high school

Use your imagination and be creative to help students talk to a variety of students in the class.

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

Often instructors pose a question to a class and students hesitate to answer. Ask a question and then ask students to vote on whether they agree or if the statement is true or false. Students vote thumbs up for agreement. They shake their thumbs up if they agree very much. They point thumbs down if they disagree. Point thumbs to the side if undecided.

(Joan's note: it could be interesting to introduce this with the something about how thumbs up and thumbs down began or has been used, the wonder of the opposable thumb, etc).

Stand Up if You Agree

A variation on the above is to ask students to stand up if they agree with a statement or reverse the procedure and have students stand up if they disagree. This gets students out of their seats and focuses their attention on the discussion.

Values Line

Place a sign in the front of the classroom which says, "Strongly Agree." Place another sign in the back that state, "Strongly Disagree." Read a values statement and ask students to form a group near the sign that represents their opinion. A neutral group can be formed in the middle. Ask students to find a partner in their group and discuss the reasons for choosing the group. Then ask students to find a partner in the opposite group and discuss the topic with someone who has a different opinion. Here are some examples of values statements:

- Potential earnings are the most important factor in choosing a career.
- It is more important to find your passion rather than to be wealthy.
- "Cramming" is an effective way to study for an exam.
- You are more likely to be successful in business if you are a judging personality type.

- You are what you think.
- Your attitude determines your behavior.

How to Kill Your Students with PowerPoint

The use of PowerPoint can be an effective teaching tool to engage students in learning if used properly. It appeals to visual learners and can be an easy way to organize a presentation. However, it is easy to misuse PowerPoint. Here are some ways to kill your students with PowerPoint:

- Read from the slides. Your students can read the slides. Reading aloud is usually not interesting unless you are an actor/actress. If you turn your back to the students to read the slides, this is even worse.
- Provide all the details. It is best to put the main points on PowerPoint and fill in the detail in the verbal part your lecture. Don't forget to provide examples and share your personal experiences when it helps in understanding the topic.
- Use a small font. Students should be able to clearly see the slides from the most distant point in the classroom. Test your slides by viewing them from the back corner of the classroom.
- Contrast is not important. Always have good contrast between the type color and background. Use a light background and dark type or a dark background with white or light type. Again, test your slides from the back of the room.
- Don't worry about spelling. Use spell check when you have finished designing your presentation. You'll be surprised how easy it is to overlook small errors.
- Kill them with color. PowerPoint provides the opportunity to use color to enhance visual images. Here is a little on the psychology of color:
 - Red, orange and yellow are warm colors. They are called warm colors because they are typically associated with hot things such as sun, heat and fire. Use these colors sparingly. They are good to use to emphasize important points.
 - Blue, green and violet are cool colors because they are associated with cool things such as water, sky and ice. These colors are generally restful, peaceful and soothing. They make good background colors.
 - Here are some specifics on color:
 - White makes other colors stand out. It provides contrast and clarity.
 - Red represents strength and dominance. It is good for emphasis.
 - Pink portrays romance and femininity.
 - Orange attracts attention and adds brightness.
 - Yellow suggests cheerfulness and sunshine.
 - Green is soothing and restful.
 - Blue is peaceful, quiet and cool.
 - Purple is a combination of blue and red and can have the characteristics of both these colors depending on lighting and shade.
- Use PowerPoint for more than 10 minutes. It is a good idea to limit PowerPoint to 10 minutes and then break it up with an activity. Students often tune out of PowerPoint presentations that are longer than 10 minutes.

Make a Commercial

When you find it difficult to generate enthusiasm and are looking for a new way to get students interested, divide students into groups and have them create a television commercial to illustrate the topic under discussion.

What is Bothering You Today?

This exercise is an unconventional one that is designed to help students to focus their attention in class. If students are distracted by other events, ask them to write down what is bothering them today. Then ask students to crumple up the paper and throw it away.

You can also discuss the idea of setting up a worry time:

- Set up a specific time each day for worrying.
- When worries distract you from your studies, remind yourself that you have set aside time for worrying.
- Tell yourself, “Be here now.” Focus on class now and then take care of the worries when you leave.
- Keep your worry appointment
- During your worry time, try to find some solutions or take some steps to resolve the things that cause you to worry.

Attendance Exercise

Choose any popular movie and write it on the board. Say that your student, _____ found the movie confusing and did not understand it. Here is why:

S/He arrives late to movies and does not see the previews.

S/He arrived 10 minutes late to the movie.

His/her cell phone rings and s/he leaves the movie to answer it.

Pretty soon nature calls and s/he leaves again.

Then s/he buys a snack.

S/He leaves to smoke a cigarette.

S/He didn't understand the movie at all. The same thing happens when you miss class.

Joan's note: add in some humour and the students' own experience and make a specific reference to the movie such as “I want to do a small experiment today to address the issue of attendance. First I need a fictional name for our main character. Can someone suggest a fictional name for our student?” After you get the name ask them for a movie that they have seen recently or a movie that everyone has likely seen (perhaps a big box office success like *Slumdog Millionaire*). Then ask everyone close their eyes or just relax for a moment and start reading through the above statements and use the name of the character. Wrap it up by possibly saying you know there are valid reasons to miss class of course but you wanted to address it since it seems to be a problem because...

Self-esteem Exercise

Do a chain of compliments around the room. The first student turns around and gives a compliment to the student next to them. Each student in turn gives a compliment to the next student. The instructor is included in the exercise too. The instructor can start with the first compliment. No compliment can be repeated twice. This exercise wakes up the class and gets everyone smiling.

Most of the above article is from:

http://74.125.155.132/search?q=cache:4L-2PDzk7TMJ:www.collegesuccess1.com/InstructorManual4thEd/TipsforEngagingStudents.doc+Practical+Tips+for+engaging+students&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ca&utm_source=SWMarketing&utm_medium=email&utm_content=6298731&utm_campaign=SEM%20Canada%3A%20Vol%2010%2C%202009