

Active Learning Strategies

Academic "speed dating" ¹	<p>“Students move at a brisk clip through several face-to-face conversations with their peers, each conversation anchored by a prompt provided by the teacher and posted on a presentations slide. A buzzer is set for 2-3 minutes, and when it goes off, students must quickly find another partner with whom to participate in a brief conversation responding to the prompt. To use this activity on the first day, create prompts that focus on the syllabus such as ‘What is the purpose of the assignment on page 8?’ as well as lighthearted prompts such as ‘Describe the most unusual or fun job you have held’ (Eifler, 2008).” (p. 115)</p>
Ball-toss ¹	<p>“This semi-review and wake-up exercise is particularly useful for re-energizing students when they have been working with material that requires heavy concentration. Craft an open-ended prompt (such as ‘In my lecture, what did you find particularly interesting? Important? Still unclear?’). Then have students stand up and form a circle facing each other. Toss a nerf ball or bean bag to a student and have him or her respond and then toss the ball to another student who also responds. Continue the exercise until everyone has caught the ball at least once and explained an important concept from the material just covered.” (p. 145)</p>
Classify ¹	<p>“Gather a collection of items (such as specimens, images, or slips of paper with information written upon them) that represent subcategories in a classification system and provide a set to each group of students. Students examine, discuss, and sort the contents into categories base on shared features as they attempt to deduce the subject's classification system. A reporter from each group then explains the group's classification system and the rules used to guide their organization to the whole class. Use the student's ideas and principles as the basis for presenting and discussing the topic's established classification system.” (p. 187)</p>
Focused reading notes ¹	<p>“This technique gives students a strategy for focusing their reading to help them become more efficient and effective learners. Prior to giving students a reading assignment, instructors identify 3-5 themes or concepts they want students to look for in the text and then choose corresponding keywords or phrases. Students use these keywords as headings for columns on a sheet of paper and enter reading notes in the appropriate column. The column headings direct students' attention to what is important and provide them with an organizational framework for writing notes about new knowledge and understandings.” (p. 164)</p> <p><u>Variation:</u> “Use ‘Focused Reading Notes’ as a preparatory activity for whole-class or small-group discussion, an essay, or an early step in a more comprehensive project.”</p>
One-minute paper ²	<p>“With books and notebooks closed, students summarize the ‘most important’ or ‘most useful’ points they learned from the day’s lecture, reading assignment, laboratory, or discussion. Time permitting, they also write down questions that remain in their minds.” (p. 168)</p>

One-sentence summary ²	“As an in-class activity or short homework assignment, students answer these questions on a specific topic in one (long) grammatical sentence: ‘Who Did What to Whom, When, Where, and Why (WDWWHWW)?’ The topic may be a historical event, the plot of a story or novel, or, by substituting another What for Who/Whom, a chemical reaction, mechanical process, or biological phenomenon. This technique makes students distill, simplify, reorganize, synthesize, and chunk complex material into smaller, essential units that are easier to manipulate and remember.” (p. 169)
Quotes ¹	<p>“Students select a slip of paper from a container filled with quotes from an assigned reading. They are given a few minutes to think about what they want to say in response to their quote, and then each student reads their quote and comments on it.”(p. 167)</p> <p><u>Variation:</u> “Ask students to find their own relevant quotes from a preparatory text. Quotes in the pre-reading can be statements that they especially liked or disliked, that best illustrated the major thesis, that they found most difficult to understand, and so forth. (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005, pp. 72-73).”</p>
Send-a-problem ¹	“Groups of students receive a problem, try to solve it, and then pass the problem and solution to a nearby group. Without looking at the previous group's solution, the next group works to solve the problem. After as many passes as seem useful, groups analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the responses to the problem they received in the final pass and report the best solution to the class.”(p. 267)
Snowball ¹	“Ask students to individually write brief responses on a blank piece of paper to a teacher-created prompt, then crush the paper into a ball and throw them around the room for a couple of minutes. When the teacher says ‘Stop,’ each student picks up a ‘snowball’ and reads its contents at the instructor's request. This technique works well to get lots of ideas out on the floor (literally!) and is a fun and energizing way to break up long stretches of class time.” (p. 145)
Stations ¹	<p>“Create a number of stations, each consisting of a prompt (e.g. a quote, a newspaper clipping, an artifact, an image, a short recording) and a worksheet with one or more questions. Organize students in groups, give each group a different marker and have each group start at a different station. Ask each group to respond to the questions on the worksheet and, after a preset interval, signal the groups to move on to the next station. Close the activity with a whole-class discussion.” (p. 170)</p> <p><u>Variation:</u> “Ask groups to visit all of the stations a second time and put a check mark next to the response (other than their own) that they think is the most thoughtful and interesting. The group that receives the most checks next to their responses receives bonus points.”</p>

Syllabus review ¹	“Form groups of 4-6, identify a recorder, and ask students to generate a list of questions about the course. Pass out the syllabus, and ask students to read it to find the answers to their questions. Ask them to note any course information about which they had not thought to ask as well as questions for which they could not find the answer. Close with a whole class discussion on the syllabus based on students' unanswered questions and their discoveries about the course.” (p. 119)
What's the problem? ¹	“Students work in pairs, looking at examples of common problem types in order to identify the particular type of problem each example represents. In this way, students support each other as they try to increase their efficiency and effectiveness in problem solving by learning to generalize problem types instead of seeing problems as isolated exemplars.” (p. 252)

¹Elizabeth F. Barkley. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: a handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

²Linda B. Nilson. (2010). *Teaching at its best: A research-based resource for college instructors*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Before you choose an activity, ask yourself: What would I like to achieve with this active learning activity?

1. Allowing students to get to know each other, reduce their anxiety and alienation.
Ideas for strategies: academic "speed dating," bingo, interviewing the person next you, syllabus review.
2. Finding out what students already know about a new topic.
Ideas for strategies: quiz with multiple-choice questions, short written answer to a question such as "In ...," polling.
3. Guiding students through learning process, help them focus on the crucial parts of the material, develop their reading or writing skills, etc.
Ideas for strategies: focused reading notes, one-sentence summary, quotes.
4. Providing opportunities for practice and application.
Ideas for strategies: quotes, classify, station, what's the problem
5. Providing opportunities for reflection on the material and/or the learning process.
Ideas for strategies: ball-toss, snowball, minute-paper, think-pair-share, journal, quotes, stations, closing summary.