

ACTIVE LEARNING

WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING?

Active learning happens when students are given the opportunity to take a more interactive relationship with the subject matter of a course, encouraging them to generate rather than simply to receive knowledge. In an active learning environment, teachers facilitate rather than dictate the students' learning.

WHY ACTIVE LEARNING?

Research has shown that active learning is an exceptionally effective teaching technique. Regardless of the subject matter, when active learning is compared to traditional teaching methods (such as lecture), students learn more material, retain the information longer, and enjoy the class more. Active learning allows students to learn in the classroom with the help of the instructor and other students, rather than on their own.

HOW TO INCORPORATE ACTIVE LEARNING INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

Employing active learning techniques in the classroom can pose difficulties to teachers and students not accustomed to this mode of instruction. The teacher surrenders some of the control of the class as s/he becomes a facilitator, and the students take increased responsibility for not only *what* but also *how* they learn. Incorporating active learning in the classroom, then, requires students to act. Try using the following techniques to offer your students the opportunity to participate actively in their learning.

- ◆ **Think-pair-share** is a simple activity you can use in any classroom format. Give students time to think about a topic, turn to their neighbor for a short discussion, and then share the results with the rest of the class.
- ◆ **Minute Papers** provide students with the opportunity to synthesize their knowledge and to ask unanswered questions. Give students a few minutes at the end of class to answer the following questions in writing: What was the most important thing you learned today? What important question remains unanswered? Variations of these questions, and the student questions and answers they generate, enhance your students' learning process and provide you with feedback on students' understanding of the subject material.
- ◆ **Writing activities** of many kinds offer students the opportunity to think about and process information. For example, in addition to minute papers, you could pose a question and then give students time to **freewrite** their answers. You could also give students time to freewrite about topics.
- ◆ **Brainstorming** is another simple technique that can involve the whole class in a discussion. Introduce a topic or problem and then ask for student input, which you record on the board.

- ◆ **Games** related to the subject can easily be incorporated into the classroom to foster active learning and participation. Games can include matching, mysteries, group competitions, solving puzzles, pictionary, etc.
- ◆ **Debates** staged in class can be effective tools for encouraging students to think about several sides of an issue.
- ◆ **Group work** allows every participant the chance to speak, share personal views, and develop the skill of working with others. Cooperative group work requires all group members to work together to complete a given task. Break the class into groups of 2-5 students. Give each group articles to read, questions to answer and discuss, information to share, subjects to teach to other groups, etc.
- ◆ **Case studies** use real-life stories that describe what happened to a community, family, school, or individual to prompt students to integrate their classroom knowledge with their knowledge of real-world situations, actions, and consequences.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Each website offers additional information on active learning, including more extensive definitions, further explanation of its benefits in the classroom, and more tips on how to incorporate active learning into your teaching.

Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom. The National Teaching & Learning Forum.

<http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/91-9dig.htm>

What is Active Learning? Buffalo University Teaching Resources.

<http://icarus.ubetc.buffalo.edu/etc/tlr/whatis.html>

Active Learning Strategies. National Training Partnership.

http://www2.edc.org/NTP/trainingdesign_activelearningstrategies.htm

Teaching and Learning Methods and Strategies. University of Arizona

<http://www.u.arizona.edu/ic/edtech/strategy.html>

Active Learning Online

http://www.acu.edu/cte/activelearning/classroom_main.htm

Active Learning and Library Instruction. Michigan State University

<http://www.libraryreference.org/activebi.html>

Active Learning Strategies. Summaries of Best Practices in College Teaching.

<http://northonline.sccd.ctc.edu/eceprog/bstprac.html#active>