
“FACILITATING STUDENTS’ PARTNERSHIP IN THEIR LEARNING”



“Facilitating Students’ Partnership in Their Learning” – a practice highlighted in the We’re All In Campaign – aims to increase familiarity with and the incorporation of a handful of the many active learning strategies, as well as some quick and easy formative assessments to help facilitate students’ partnership role in their learning.

Before exploring the resources related to this practice below, it is worth a moment to read and consider some thoughts of Professor Emeritus Jerry Farber as articulated in his “Teaching Technique – Some Suggestions,” in which he advocates for creating an active, engaged, and meaningful learning environment:

. . . these [teaching] suggestions are not meant to be intimidating, like some checklist of skills that you’re supposed to have down before you can get your teaching license. . . . And even those of us who might agree with these notions about teaching don’t always perform up to them.

So please don’t feel that you’re supposed to have it all together right from the start. What happens with most of us – or ought to happen—is that we get some things down, and then we set new goals. It’s the direction that matters. What’s important is that you continue trying to improve, that you never stop working on your teaching, that you master the art of cheerfully, optimistically demanding everything that you possibly can from yourself, that you refuse to settle for less. It’s foolish to deny (or rationalize) your weaknesses as a teacher, but there’s nothing to be gained by brooding over them morosely. What I urge, instead, is that you commit yourself to a thoughtfully, confident, ambitious, future-oriented program of continual improvement—for as long as you teach.

AN OVERVIEW OF RESOURCES BELOW

- ▶ **what is “active learning”**
- ▶ **two instructional strategies** (“Think. Pair. Share.” and “Turn and Talk.” which address the following ideas from *Facilitating Equitable Discussions within a Multicultural Classroom (Diversity and Motivation, 387-90)*.
 - “Allow students to first share and rehearse their responses to a key question or comments on topic with a partner to increase learning, confidence, and motivation to contribute to a unified class discussion.”
 - “Do not constantly pose questions to the group at large, allowing a minority of more confident or impulsive students to dominate the discussion.”
- ▶ **a sampling of other common active learning strategies**
- ▶ **some keys to success in integrating active learning activities**
- ▶ **some thoughts on [active] learning . . . to spark your own**



WHAT IS ACTIVE LEARNING

- is generally defined as any instructional method that engages students in the **learning** process. In short, **active learning** requires students to do meaningful **learning** activities and think about what they are doing.
- "anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).
- "anything course-related that all students in a class session are called upon to do other than simply watching, listening and taking notes" (Felder & Brent, 2009).
- can be integrated into a lecture or any other classroom setting relatively easily.
- can be as short as a few minutes long.



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Think. Pair. Share.

The “Think. Pair. Share.” strategy promotes classroom participation by encouraging a high degree of student response and increases students’ sense of involvement in classroom learning. “Think. Pair. Share.” can also be used as an information assessment tool; as students discuss their ideas, the instructor can circulate and listen to the conversations taking place. “Think. Pair. Share.” is easy to use within a planned lesson, but is also an easy strategy to use for spur-of-the-moment discussions.

The think, pair, share strategy is a cooperative learning that encourages individual participation. It involves three distinct steps:

1. **Think:** Students think independently about the question that has been posed, forming ideas of their own. Amount of time: usually between 1-3 minutes.
2. **Pair:** Students are grouped in pairs to discuss their thoughts. This step allows students to articulate their ideas and to consider those of others. Amount of time: 2-5 minutes.
3. **Share:** Student pairs share their ideas with a larger group, such as the whole class. Often, students are more comfortable presenting ideas to a group with the support of a partner. In addition, students’ ideas have become more refined through this three-step process. After the class “share,” you may choose to have pairs reconvene to talk about how their thinking perhaps changed as a result of the “share” element.

Turn and Talk.

This strategy permits all students to participate in discussion, rather than only a few. All students are able to process new learning while engaging in meaningful conversation with a classmate.

HOW TO USE

1. **Question:** Pose a question or prompt for students to discuss and tell them how much time they will have. A one-to-two minute discussion is most productive.
2. **Turn:** Have students turn to a specific partner. Partner assignments should be set up beforehand so that students can quickly and easily pair up.
3. **Talk:** Set a time for the allotted time, and have students begin discussing the assigned question or prompt. When time is up, ask partners to share out thoughts and ideas from their discussion.

WHEN TO USE

- ✓ As a warm up activity to discuss a previous lesson or homework assignment.
- ✓ After five to seven minutes of oral input, to help students process what they have just heard.
- ✓ During class discussions as a way for students to discuss ideas before sharing them with the class.
- ✓ As a closing activity so that students can review what was learned in the class session.

A SAMPLING OF OTHER COMMON ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Think/Pair/Share

Have students turn to someone near them to summarize what they're learning, to answer a question posed during the discussion, or to consider how and why and when they might apply a concept. This works well with pre-planned questions and with ideas that emerge during a larger group discussion. The objectives are to engage students with the material on an individual level, in pairs, and finally as a large group. The activity can help to organize prior knowledge; brainstorm questions; or summarize, apply, or integrate new information. Approximate time: six to eight minutes. The procedure is as follows: 1) individuals reflect on (and perhaps jot notes) for one minute in response to a question; 2) they pair up with someone sitting near them and share responses/thoughts verbally for two minutes, or they may choose to work together to create a synthesis of ideas or come to a consensus; 3) the discussion leader/instructor randomly chooses a few pairs to give thirty-second summaries of ideas.

Write/Pair/Share

The format for this strategy is identical to the think-pair-share, except that students process the question asked of them by writing about it rather than reflecting. After a brief time to note their thoughts, each student turns to a partner to discuss. The activity closes with the instructor calling on random students to summarize their responses. As with the think-pair-share, the instructor may choose to skip the summary portion of the exercise depending on circumstances.

Student Summaries

During a class session, the instructor pauses and asks students to explain to a partner the central concepts just presented. The activity can be altered in several ways. The instructor can request that students write or think individually prior to discussing with a partner, making the activity resemble a think/write-pair-share.

One Minute Paper/Free Write

Ask students to write for 2-3 minutes on a topic or in response to a question that you've developed for the session. Again, this is particularly useful in those moments in which instructors are asking students to move from one level of understanding to another, from presentation of new ideas to application of ideas, from considerations about self to situations involving others. These moments of writing provide a transition for students by bringing together prior learning, relevant experience and new insights as a means of moving to a new (aspect of the) topic. The writing offers students a moment to explore ideas before discussion, or to bring closure to a session by recording ideas in their minds at that moment. A minute of writing is also a useful thing when discussion takes a turn you didn't expect – when a particularly good question comes from the group, when discussion keeps circulating around a basic idea rather than inching its way into potential applications or deepening of ideas. This is useful with other active learning tools.

Note Check

Students pair with a partner/small group to briefly (2-5 minutes) share notes. They can clarify key points covered, generate and/or resolve questions, generate a problem to solve, solve a problem posed by the instructor, or write a paragraph synthesizing key ideas as set out in partner's notes.

Background Knowledge Probe

Background knowledge probe (BKP) questionnaires ask for basic, simple responses (short answers, circling/showing of hands in response to multiple choice questions) from students who are about to begin a course, a unit, or study of a new concept. Such probes are meant to help teachers determine effective starting points/appropriate levels of instruction for a given subject and/or class. Used to both open and close course activities, a BKP helps students focus attention on what will be important material.

*excerpted from University of Minnesota's Center for Teaching and Learning
<https://cei.umn.edu/support-services/tutorials/what-active-learning/basic-active-learning-strategies>*

Construction Spiral

Pose problems in a three-step learning cycle:

- 1) students write down their individual thoughts;
- 2) students share their thinking in response to the prompt/task in small groups, work toward consensus, and representatives from each group record their shared answer on the whiteboard;
- 3) the instructor avoids evaluating or changing what the various groups record, has students identify and work through differences. Let the class refine its own thinking. If necessary, the instructor poses an additional prompt or problem.

Exit Slip • Ticket-Out-The-Door • Fuzzy/Clear

In the final few minutes of class, ask students to reflect – on an index card or half sheet of paper – on their learning over the class session. They can summarize the most important aspects of the class session, or use one side of the card/paper to record something from the class session that is still “fuzzy” or confusing to them AND – on the other side of the card/paper, something else that is now clear to them. These cards can be submitted to instructors on the way out the door. In quickly reviewing them (without grading them) after class, instructors can get an impression of where their students are and then address “fuzzy” content in a subsequent class session.

No-Points Quiz

A “No-Points Quiz” is a low-stakes strategy that give teachers a “pulse check” on student comprehension. Removing the point value from a quiz helps students see learning as process.

Various Methods of Conducting a during-the-class “Pulse Check”

SOME KEYS TO SUCCESS IN INTEGRATING ACTIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

from University of Minnesota's Center for Teaching and Learning

- Be creative! Invent new strategies and adapt existing ones to your needs.
- Start small and be brief.
- Develop a plan for an active learning activity, try it out, collect feedback, then modify and try it again.
- Start from the first day of class and stick with it. Students will come to expect active learning and perform better.
- Be explicit with students about why you are doing this and what you know about the learning process.
- Request students vary their seating arrangements to increase their chances to work with different people. Have students occasionally pair up with the student behind them, since friends often sit side by side.
- Use questions from in-class activities on tests. For example, include a short essay question that was used in a think/pair/share.
- Negotiate a signal for students to stop talking.
- Find a colleague or two to plan with (and perhaps teach with) while you're implementing active learning activities.
- Continue learning through workshops, reading, and practice.

SOME THOUGHTS ON [ACTIVE] LEARNING . . . TO SPARK YOUR OWN

- ✓ Think of active learning as an approach to instruction in which students engage the material they study through reading, writing, talking, listening, and reflecting. Active learning stands in contrast to "standard" modes of instruction in which teachers do most of the talking and students are passive.

Students and their learning needs are at the center of active learning. There are many teaching strategies that can be employed to actively engage students in the learning process . . . and the benefits to using such activities are many, including improved critical thinking skills, increased retention and transfer of new information, increased motivation, and improved interpersonal skills.

~ *What is Active Learning?*

University of Minnesota's Center for Teaching and Learning
<https://cei.umn.edu/support-services/tutorials/what-active-learning>

- ✓ The past decade has seen an explosion of interest among college faculty in the teaching methods variously grouped under the terms 'active learning' and 'cooperative learning'. However, even with this interest, there remains much misunderstanding of and mistrust of the pedagogical "movement" behind the words. . . Some of the criticism and hesitation seems to originate in the idea that techniques of active and cooperative learning are genuine alternatives to, rather than enhancements of, professors' lectures. We provide . . . a survey of a wide variety of active learning techniques which can be used to supplement rather than replace lectures. We are not advocating complete abandonment of lecturing, as both of us still lecture about half of the class period. The lecture is a very efficient way to present information but use of the lecture as the only mode of instruction presents problems for both the instructor and the students. There is a large amount of research attesting to the benefits of active learning.

~ *Active Learning For The College Classroom*

Jennifer L. Faust • Department of Philosophy
Donald R. Paulson • Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
<https://www.calstatela.edu/dept/chem/chem2/Active/main.htm>

- ✓ “When you’re doing pretty much straight lecture, pacing can be very important. A lecture needs some air in it, some space; we need to give the people room to think, time to absorb what is happening. I much admire teaching that doesn’t waste people’s time, that covers a lot of ground. But it’s not enough merely to “cover” material; learning has to take place, right? If we try to remain very much aware of the mood, the energy, the interest level of the class, we’re more likely to see to it that things are actually getting through. . . . a course should have texture: a variety of teaching modes and activities. . . . “The less motivated and advanced the students are, the more this matters, but it’s by no means a negligible issue in, say, graduate courses. Even within a single class session, texture can be a consideration – especially when you’re lecturing.

~ *Teaching Technique – Some Suggestions by Jerry Farber*

- ✓ When students talk about a topic, whether answering a teacher's question or explaining a point to another student, they organize and reinforce what they've learned.

In the all-too-typical lecture class, the lecturer stops talking at the very end of the period. Students gather up their notes and books and run for their next class. One can almost see the knowledge evaporating from their brains. They've had no time to reflect, to connect what they've just learned with what they already know, or to use the knowledge they've gained in any way. Allowing students to pause for thought, to use their new knowledge to teach each other, or to answer questions on the day's topics is one of the simplest ways to increase retention.

Elements of Active Learning
Center for Teaching and Learning • University of Minnesota

- ✓ Everything you plan for a class is in competition with all other possibilities that are open to you. Show you show a video? Fine – as long as it pulls its weight, as long as it is pretty much the best use you could make of that class time [. . .] Quickwrites? Small group work? Presentations and reports? Fine – as long as they’re functional, and not just a way to buy time [. . .]

Generally speaking, I think we need to be wary of cutesy little teacherly stuff that creates a lot of motion but not much light: “All right, now I want everyone to take out a sheet of paper [. . .] Then I want you to form groups of four [. . .] Then I want [. . .].” But this is by no means a warning against creative, class-centered activities that seem likely to pull their weight. And we have to remember that some activities may not be directly learning-oriented but may help to create a productive class atmosphere. Fine. What I am saying is that it’s wise to learn to be very very critical and demanding in making selections from a pedagogical repertoire. The challenge isn’t just to fill time, to keep students busy, or even merely to be “creative” of find fun things to do. Class time is precious. It’s like a rectangle of canvas, and you’re Cezanne; you don’t just throw anything in a painting.

~ *Teaching Technique – Some Suggestions*
Jerry Farber

Do teachers really know what students go through? To find out one teacher followed two students for two days and was amazed at what she found:

“I have made a terrible mistake. I waited 14 years to do something that I should have done my first year of teaching: shadow a student for a day. It was so eye-opening . . .

Key Takeaway 1:

Students sit all day, and sitting is exhausting.

I could not believe how tired I was after the first day. I literally sat down the entire day. . . . We forget as teachers By the end of the day, I could not stop yawning and I was desperate to move or stretch I was drained, and not in a good long, productive-day kind of way. . . . I had planned to go back to my office and jot down some initial notes on the day, but I was so drained I couldn’t do anything that involved mental effort . . . and was in bed by 830.

Key Takeaway 2:

students are sitting passively and listening during approximately 90 percent of their classes.

My host students rarely spoke. Sometimes it was because the teacher was lecturing; sometimes it was because another student was presenting; sometimes it was because another student was called to the board to solve a difficult equation; and sometimes it was because the period was spent taking a test.

It was not just the sitting that was draining but that so much of the day was spent absorbing information but not often grappling with it.

~ from Valerie Strauss'

"Teacher spends two days as a student and is shocked at what she learns."

*The article also goes into detail about the "minimum of ten things"
[the teacher] Alexis Wiggins said she would change.*