

Active Learning Strategies for the Online Classroom

We want to engage our students as active participants in their own learning rather than as passive absorbers of information. L. Dee Fink, in *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, provides a framework that can be used to promote active learning:

- Encounter new information/ideas
- Engage with the information/ideas
- Reflect upon their learning

This approach may be used in all modalities (face-to-face, online or hybrid). Here are some simple ways to encourage participation in your online courses. Select only the active learning strategies that best support your course/unit learning objectives. And remember, active learning strategies can be utilized before, during or after the online class session.

Step 1: Encounter

Whether teaching synchronously or asynchronously, chunk content into Mini Lectures (8-10 minutes); you may use as many mini lectures as needed. Provide a short explanation/introduction to the topic to help students understand its value (how it relates to course objectives/transferrable skills etc.) Readings, videos, etc., may also be used to introduce the material; again, it is helpful to briefly frame your objective. You may intersperse questions/reflection points along the way, or may keep questions for the “engagement” portion of the lesson.

Step 2: Engage

Students can deepen their connections with the material, with you, and with each other in a number of ways

Synchronously

- Small group sessions (creating channels in MS Teams, breakout rooms in Zoom, Group me, etc.), where they can discuss issues, questions, concerns, problem sets etc. related to the content. Assign roles to ensure full participation (e.g. facilitator and timekeeper, notetaker, challenger, reporter, etc.) Alternatively, depending on your learning objective, Jigsaw may be used: Students work in small groups, with each group becoming an expert in a particular aspect of the material. Groups come together to teach each other. (This approach may be modified to have each group member become an expert in an aspect of the topic.)
- Polling: Top Hat, Poll Everywhere, etc.)
- Sharing/collaborating (shared documents)
- Think-Pair-Share. Students think through a problem, pair with a partner to discuss, and then share out to larger group

Asynchronously: Almost all of these strategies may be used asynchronously using discussion boards, VoiceThread, etc. Note: When using discussion boards, it may be helpful to post at the beginning and end of the thread; studies show that too little instructor presence diminishes students participation, whereas instructor posting is often taken by students to signal that the discussion has ended)

Step 3: Reflect

Synchronously and Asynchronously

- Minute papers (more realistically ~5 minutes or less) Students respond to a prompt; may be used to check understanding, to prompt questioning or to encourage reflection.)
- Muddiest point. Students note the area that gives them greatest concern. Instructor collates information and discusses themes with students.