

Tips for Active Learning

Active Learning techniques referenced in chapter 5 of The Role of the Classroom in College Student Persistence include: classroom discussion; classroom debate; identifying fallacies; argue for/against; defend point of view or argument in a paper or project; propose a plan for research/project/experiment. Below are ideas for spicing up discussions and debates; and ideas for using exploratory writing, which was not included but perhaps should have been ☺.

A. Classroom Discussions

1. Journal of Active Learning in Higher Education, published by Sage. Abstracts available to Truman people. <http://alh.sagepub.com/archive/>
2. Arizona State University Best Practices in Engineering Education links to 3 active learning structures that are content-free and thus useful in any discipline. They are:
 - Round Robin Brainstorming <http://clte.asu.edu/active/roundrobin.pdf>
 - Using JigSaw in the college classroom <http://clte.asu.edu/active/usingjig.pdf>
 - Using Think-Pair-Share in the college classroom <http://clte.asu.edu/active/usingtps.pdf>
3. Other ways to structure class discussion include:
 - Call on the next speaker –each discussion participant calls on who they want to respond to their contribution. Instructors can set the rules to include themselves or exclude themselves.
 - At the beginning of class each student submits two questions for discussion. Throughout class call on students to respond to the student-generated questions.
4. The Instructor’s Guide to Active Training: A Handbook of Techniques, Designs, Case Examples, and Tips , 3rd Edition by Mel Silberman <http://higheredbcs.wiley.com/legacy/college/silberman/0787976237/ig/ig.pdf> has several ideas:
 - Start off with student teams reviewing an artifact of the topic for the class session (p. 25)
 - Learning tournaments (p. 27)
 - Role-playing (p. 33)

B. Classroom Debates

1. Lincoln - Douglas debate structure for a formal debate between either individuals or teams. This one of many online instructions is posted by Professor Tomlinson of Bloomsburg University: http://facstaff.bloomu.edu/jtomlins/debate_formats.htm

2. Education World's *More Resources for Classroom Debate*

http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson304b.shtml includes these techniques:

- **Three-Card strategy** -- This technique can be used as a pre-debate strategy to help students gather the teacher provides each student with two or three cards on which are printed the words "Comment or Question." When a student wishes to make a point as part of the discussion, he or she raises one of the cards; after making a comment or asking a question pertinent to the discussion, the student turns in the card. When a student has used all the cards, he or she cannot participate again in the discussion until all students have used all their cards.
- **Tag Team Debate strategy** -- In a tag team debate, each team of five members represents one side of a debatable question. Each team has a set amount of time (say, 5 minutes) to present its point of view. When it's time for the team to state its point of view, one speaker from the team takes the floor. That speaker can speak for no more than 1 minute, and must "tag" another member of the team to pick up the argument before his or her minute is up. Team members who are eager to pick up a point or add to the team's argument, can put out a hand to be tagged. That way, the current speaker knows who might be ready to pick up the team's argument. No member of the team can be tagged twice until all members have been tagged once.
- **Role Play Debate strategy** -- In the Lincoln-Douglas debate format, students play the roles of Constructor, Cross-Examiner, and so on. But many topics lend themselves to a different form of debate -- the *role-play debate*. In a role-play debate, students examine different points of view or perspectives related to an issue. See a sample lesson: [Role Play Debate](#).
- **Fishbowl strategy** -- (in the "fishbowl"), other students observe the action from outside the fishbowl. To actively involve observers, appoint them to judge the debate; have each observer keep a running tally of new points introduced by each side as the debate progresses. Note: If you plan to use debates in the future, it might be a good idea to videotape the final student debates your current students present. Those videos can be used to help this year's students evaluate their participation, and students in the videos can serve as the "fishbowl" group when you introduce the debate structure to future students.
- **Four Corners Debate strategy** -- In this active debate strategy, students take one of four positions on an issue. They either strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. See a sample lesson: [Four Corners Debate](#).

C. Exploratory Writing

1. Aaron Copeland School of Music – Queens College – lists these kinds of low-stakes exploratory writing that can be done in class: review question, a question intended to synthesize materials covered, or a question intended to stimulate thought and interest in the day's class topic. A class can also be interrupted for a brief period of in-class writing if the students run out of things to say, if the discussion gets so heated that everyone wants to talk at once, or if the material is difficult and a writing question can help the students to articulate what they have understood so far. Writing can also be used at the end of class to help the students sum up and assimilate a lecture or discussion.
2. The US Military Academy posts these exploratory writing prompts:
 - Your grandmother, who has only a high school education and no scientific background, is fascinated with your courses at West Point, particularly chemistry. Since the mole is such a key concept, write an explanation for your grandmother, using examples that would be relevant to her, so that she will be able to understand this concept. You must do this in 100 words or less.
 - In the story you're reading for our next class, there are five characters. Imagine that Steven Spielberg is planning to make a movie of this story and has consulted you for advice on casting. Bring to class your list, identifying at least one actor or actress who would be suitable for each character.
3. Students hand in an abstract or other short summary [of the reading, of the session or whatever]. Each of these summaries becomes their cheat sheets that they are allowed to use for an upcoming quiz or test.
4. Post a class WIKI inside Blackboard which students create and manage as their understanding of the entry topic grows.