

Active Learning in Face-to-Face & Online Courses

The information for this tip sheet comes from Mel Silberman's (1996) book **Active Learning: 101 strategies to teach any subject**. Silberman has been using active learning techniques in university classrooms for over 25 years. His book **Active Learning 101 strategies to teach any subject** has concrete ideas which can be used for face-to-face classes and many can be adapted to an online environment. This book is an excellent resource to have on your bookshelf.



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Why Active Learning?

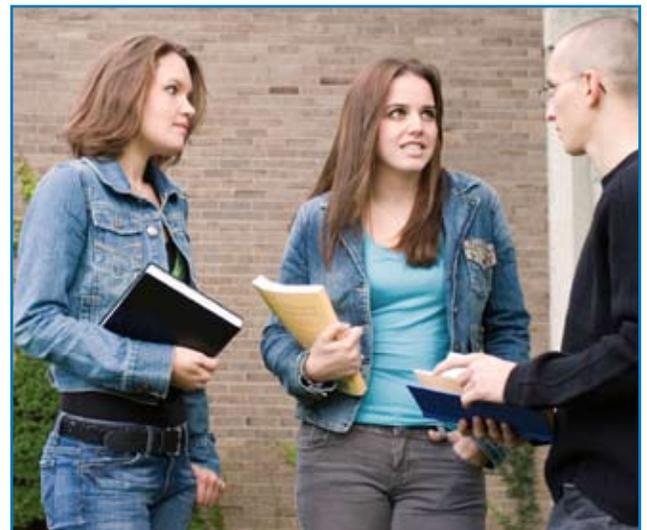
"Students learn best by doing" (Silberman, M, 1996, p. ix). Active learning is a teaching method that involves students in the learning process rather than seeing them as passive recipients. "Active learning asks that students use content knowledge, not just acquire it" (Cameron, B, 1999 p. 9). The purpose of active learning is to improve students' comprehension, retention and overall learning.

Active learning is a teaching method that incorporates a variety of activities to get the brain working. Students need to hear, see, question, discuss, use and teach the content (Silberman, 1996). This is true in online and blended environments as well as in face-to-face classes.

Consider this: Teachers speak at approximately 100 – 200 words per minute. This greatly differs from the listening rate of students who are actively paying attention, they will only be able to hear and process about 50-100 words per minute and thus will get lost in the lecture. Active learning techniques allow instructors to pause a lecture and initiate short activities that give students a chance to reflect on their learning, catch up or do something with the material (Silberman, 1996).

Within a class, students will have a variety learning styles. Some may learn best by hearing, others through visuals and still others by doing. It is important to offer as many activities and opportunities to meet all learning styles. This may include adding a visual to a PowerPoint presentation and then asking students to turn to a neighbor and discuss it. In this short example you may have hit 3 different learning styles.

While there are some common challenges to implementing active learning techniques in the classroom, the opportunities far out way these challenges. When done appropriately, active learning has been shown to increase student motivation, class preparation and participation, retention and knowledge



Give Me an Example

Learning Tournament

This activity involves splitting the class into equal teams. Everyone is given material to study together. In round one, students answer instructor-prepared questions individually, however the scores are all added up together as the team score. Continue in the same fashion through round 2 and 3 and so on. The purpose of this activity is to promote group study, team competition and the learning of course related concepts and skills.

Online, group areas can be created where teams can study together through discussions, sharing of ideas and perhaps anticipating the questions to come. Then individual tests are taken via an online quiz, but the scores are added up for the entire team.

More Ideas

Group Resume

The purpose of the group resume is to help facilitate student interaction and team building.

First, in the group area of a learning management system (i.e., Blackboard) split the class into small groups (3 – 6 members). Tell the groups that they need to build a resume, which highlights the talents and skills of all group members combined. The resume may include such items as educational background, employment history, skills, etc. You may want the groups to create a MS Word document such as a sample resume, perhaps even including a company name and logo. Ask all groups to post their final resumes in the main discussion board of the learning management system so that other class members can read, respond, question and become aware of the diverse student talents and skills within the class.

Other Considerations

Teach students how to be active:

1. Many students may not know how to behave or participate within an active class and thus it is important to teach students how to actively engage with their peers and the teacher. On day one, get students involved. For example, if you are going to use discussions in your class be sure to have a discussion on day one so that students know what to expect and how to succeed in your class.
2. Start small – If active learning techniques are new to you or you are not sure how well it will work, start with one small activity and examine if the learning opportunities outweigh the challenges.
3. Do different things. Repetition gets boring, inter-mix new activities to change things up.
4. Remember active learning does not always mean group work or movement. For example, after a brief lecture you can give students one minute to reflect on the key concepts and begin to explore how this new concept fits with past information.
5. Try it!

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Where Can I Go for More Information?

1. Active Learning 101 Strategies to teach any subject

Silberman, M. (1996). Allyn and Bacon; Boston.

This book includes 101 concrete strategies to actively engage your class. Activities focus on a variety of topics including team building, stimulating class discussion, peer teaching, skill development, reviewing strategies, and many others.

2. Active Learning Online

From The Abilene Christian University Adams Center for Teaching Excellence

Includes video of process and instructions.

<http://www.acu.edu/cte/activelearning>

3. Active Learning

A Web-based resource by D. L. Dee Fink. Many college teachers today want to move past passive learning to active learning, to find better ways of engaging students in the learning process. But many teachers feel a need for help in imagining what to do, in or out of class that would constitute a meaningful set of active learning activities.

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/active.htm>

4. Active Learning Online

The online courses profiled on this Web site won Paul Allen Virtual Education Outstanding Online Course Awards. Explore each course to see how active learning was implemented in the online environment.

<http://www.avln.org/tech/activepaaward.html>

5. Active Learning in an Asynchronous Learning Environment: A Classroom Demonstration

A paper by Keith W. Miller, Dept. of Computer Science, Univ. of Illinois at Springfield, which was presented at the OEC International Conference on Ethics in Engineering and Computer Science, March 1999

<http://onlineethics.org/edu/activelearning.html>