

Getting Started with Active Learning Guide

How to use the guide:

This guide contains 30 activities adaptable for a variety of disciplines, class sizes, etc. Review the “I want to” column and select a statement describing a goal for a course you teach. Then, review corresponding items in the “Activity Examples” column. Note that many of the activities contain a hyperlink leading to more information and/or example(s). Determine if there is an example that is a good fit for your course.

For assistance with selecting, modifying, or implementing an activity, please contact the Center at cte@tamu.edu.

I want to:	Activity Examples
Move students from passive to active in the classroom	1. Think-Pair-Share : The instructor develops and poses a question to the students. The students have time to formulate their response before sharing their ideas with their partner.
	2. Guided Notes : Students are given a set of partial notes with critical information and/or examples missing or incomplete. Students have the opportunity to complete the notes during the class session.
Monitor progress on specific student learning outcomes	3. Minute Paper : During last 5 minutes of class, instructor asks students to answer one or two questions on an index card or half sheet of paper. Questions can include: "What was the most important thing you learned during the class?" "What important questions remain unanswered?" Cards/papers are handed in as students leave classroom.
	4. Muddiest Point : Can be used at any time during a class session. Students are asked to write down on an index card or half sheet of paper what they found least clear or most confusing in a teaching presentation or activity: "What was the muddiest point in the (lecture, assignment, discussion, play, film, video etc.)?" When collected at the end of class, they provide information valuable for start of next class session. Also called MUD (Most Unclear Detail) cards (<i>MIT Teaching & Learning Lab 2016</i>).



I want to:	Activity Examples
Check prior knowledge	<p>5. <u>Background Knowledge Probe</u>: Students complete a simple questionnaire that gives the instructor a quick look at their knowledge and preparedness prior to beginning content area or session. More information here.</p>
	<p>6. <u>Misconception/Preconception Check</u>: Focuses on uncovering prior knowledge or beliefs that may hinder or block further learning. Create a simple questionnaire (as form to be handed out) to elicit information about students' ideas and beliefs in an area identified as being associated with troublesome misconceptions or preconceptions. For the instructor, this check identifies specific problem areas, how these might interfere with learning in the course, and how deeply embedded the misconceptions/preconceptions are in student thinking.</p>
Build connections	<p>7. Best Summary: Students write a summary at the end of a unit, lecture, or other assignment. They then work in groups to compare their summaries, choosing the best one.</p>
	<p>8. Consider This: Students are asked to figure out a way to apply a theory or concept that they have been taught to a new context.</p>
Pose questions for engagement	<p>9. Think Again!: The instructor presents a common misconception or misunderstanding in the discipline and then takes a quick poll asking students to agree or disagree. They then tell the students that it is untrue and the students have to prove why.</p>
	<p>10. <u>Essential Questions</u>: Different from those that hook, lead, or guide – they are foundational, recurring questions.</p> <p>Example of an Essential Question: “What do effective problem solver do when they get stuck?” Example of a Non-Essential Question: “What steps did you follow to get the answer?”</p>



I want to:	Activity Examples
Establish relevance	<p>11. Go for the Goal: Students create a prioritized list of their learning goals at the beginning of either the term, a specific unit of study, or designated activity.</p>
	<p>12. Comprehensive Factors List: Students use information they have gained from a reading, lecture, video, etc. and make a list of as many relevant factors as they can for a topic.</p>
	<p>13. Demonstration: Instructor does a demonstration using props to illustrate a course concept (consider involving student volunteers).</p>
	<p>14. Current Event: Instructor incorporates a current event example from news source connected to course concept (students can also be asked to contribute current events).</p>
	<p>15. Research Example: Instructor uses an example from personal/disciplinary research connected to course concept (graduate students or undergraduate students can also be asked to share information).</p>
Introduce content/concepts	<p>16. Entry and Exit Tickets: Students reflect on assignment or activity by writing a brief response to an instructor provided question on an index card providing information about their understanding.</p>
	<p>17. Course-Related Self-Confidence Surveys: Usually administered at start of course or new section to determine students' self-confidence in their ability to learn certain concepts or perform certain skills. May help instructor structure assignments more effectively.</p>



I want to:	Activity Examples
Demonstrate knowledge of content/concepts	18. Concept Maps: Drawings or diagrams showing mental connections students make between a major (new) concept, and other, previously learned concepts. Provides an observable and assessable record of students' conceptual schemes or the associations they make in relation to a given focal concept.
	19. Invent the Quiz: Students write sample test questions related to what they have been learning and then create an answer sheet to go with the questions.
Strengthen knowledge of content/concepts	20. Defining Features Matrix: Students are asked to categorize concepts according to the presence (+) or absence (-) of important defining features. Best used when concepts are similar; e.g., to distinguish between different conceptions of "democracy." The instructor prepares a grid showing the concepts and defining features.
	21. Pro and Con Grid: Instructor can use the grid as a quick overview of students' analysis of pros/cons, costs/benefits, advantages/ disadvantages of an issue or concern. Forces students to go beyond first reactions, to search for at least two sides to an issue, and to weigh the value of competing claims. Grid should be prepared listing issues or concerns as row headers and basis for analysis as column headers. Students are to write in a short response in each cell on the grid.
Assess knowledge of content/concepts	22. Crib Cards: Students are given possible topics and questions that will be on an exam. They are allowed to create 3x5 cards based upon these topics to use during the exam as a guide.
	23. Formative Quiz: Students answer an exam type question presented by the instructor and then share their answers with other students. After sharing, the instructor gives the correct answer and discusses the shared responses to develop a more complex answer.



I want to:	Activity Examples
<p>Help students reflect on learning</p>	<p>24. <u>Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ)</u>: Students are given the same five questions at different points throughout the course. They write their reflections to each question and see how their knowledge as grown as the course progresses.</p>
	<p>25. <u>What? So What? Now What? Journal</u>: Students create journal entries, reflecting on recent course experiences, asking questions for analysis. These questions can be shared during class.</p>
	<p>26. <u>Fortunately-Unfortunately</u>: Students develop and share statements identifying favorable and unfavorable information associated with a content area to check and reinforce understanding.</p>
	<p>27. <u>Visual Prompt</u>: Students respond to an image (photo, graph, etc.) by describing relevant features, interpreting meaning, explaining how the graphic came to be, or suggesting a hypothesis (<i>MIT Teaching & Learning Lab, 2016</i>).</p>
<p>Reinforce knowledge of content/concepts</p>	<p>28. <u>Three-Minute Message</u>: Students have three minutes to present a compelling argument and supporting details with examples. This is modeled after the Three-Minute Thesis.</p>
	<p>29. <u>Stand Where You Stand</u>: Students read two essays that relate to a controversial issue. The issue must have distinct opposing viewpoints. The instructor presents a statement that reflects one of the viewpoint and students decide if they agree or disagree, backing up their decision with content material. Students can change their mind as rationales are given.</p>
	<p>30. <u>Classify</u>: Students examine, discuss, and sort content related items into categories and work to deduce the instructor’s method of choosing each item.</p>



References

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