

Enhance engagement in your classroom: A toolkit for active, student-centered learning

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Ice-breaker: Two truths and one lie about my teaching style

Take out a piece of paper and write down three statements about yourself and your teaching – in a random order:

- Two true statements
- One lie

Anna's Example:

- I use quizzes to help my students practice new material
- I always use a visual presentation in my class (e.g., Power Point)
- I expect my students to read the assigned material (e.g., articles, book chapters) before they come to my class

Stand up, walk around the room, and mingle:

- Introduce yourself
- Share your statements with your partner
- Guess which statements are true and which one is a lie
- Move on to the next partner

What is your
teaching
style?

Teachers come in many different forms.
Each teacher has a unique teaching style
that works best for them



Take the quiz and find out more about your
own teaching style

Please refer to the document: **Your
Teaching Style**

Teaching styles

1

AUTHORITARIAN

- Clear Explanations & Direct Instruction
- Lectures, Presentations & Multimedia
- **Best For:** Structured Learning & Clear Foundations



FACILITATOR

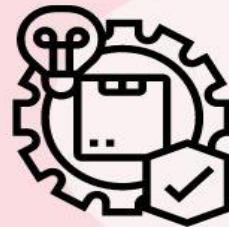
2

- Fosters Student-Centered Discussions
- Encourages Collaboration & Group Projects
- **Best For:** Developing Critical Thinking & Communication Skills

3

DEMONSTRATOR

- "Show, Don't Tell" with Hands-on Activities
- Visual Aids & Technology Integration
- **Best For:** Kinesthetic Learners & Engaging Activities



DELEGATOR

4

- Empowers Students with Independent Projects
- Provides Guidance & Scaffolding
- **Best For:** Self-Directed Learning & Problem-Solving Skills

Teaching styles

- Please refer to the document:
 - **Teaching Styles Jigsaw**



Teaching styles jigsaw activity

1

You will be assigned a teaching style and a group:

- Authoritarian
- Facilitator
- Demonstrator
- Delegator

2

Read the information on your handout, and fill out the table with the following information:

- Brief description of the teaching style
- What the teacher needs to do
- Who is this style best for?

3

You will be assigned to a new group:

- Share your information with them
- Add the information you obtain from them to the table

Traditional approaches to instruction

- The teacher delivers information through lectures, presentations, and direct instruction
- Students are expected to absorb the knowledge and demonstrate progress through tests and assignments
- Limitations of the traditional large-group, teacher-led classroom structure:
 - Uni-directional communication: teacher → learners
 - Few opportunities for learners to engage in output production and negotiation of meaning
 - Students may feel intimidated to speak in front of the whole group
 - Few or no opportunities for in-depth processing
 - Lack of motivation and agency

The Atlas complex in higher education

- Recall Atlas, a titan in Greek mythology who was condemned to forever bear the weight of the world upon his shoulders
- In education, the image has become a metaphor of the role of the teacher in the classroom



Active learning

- Active learning is the type of learning characterized by strong student engagement both in and out of the classroom
- It can be contrasted with "traditional" types of instruction in which students are passive recipients of knowledge from an expert (e.g., independent passive reading, completing a worksheet, or listening to a lecture)
- Active teacher roles:
 - Facilitator
 - Demonstrator
 - Delegator
- Active learning includes:
 - Cooperative learning
 - Peer teaching
 - Problem-based learning
 - Experiential learning



Characteristics of active learning

- In active learning, the teacher's role changes from that of an **authoritarian/leader/lecturer** to that of a **coach/demonstrator/facilitator/mentor**
- In active learning, students assume more responsibility for their own work and learning
 - Students learn more from interacting with other students than from listening to lectures
 - Student motivation increases because they are given more responsibility and agency
 - Students are more cognitively challenged because they have to work actively with the course material (e.g., they have to summarize content using their own words, or apply knowledge to solve new problems rather than listen passively)

Benefits of active learning

- Many opportunities for interaction
- A chance for natural language and content practice
- A higher percentage of student talk
- More efficient use of time: more time on task
- A safe environment for communication
- Two-way communication – a chance to both ask and answer questions
- Added variety to classroom routines and activities
- Opportunity to practice social skills
- Students at center stage rather than the teacher

Peer/Collaborative learning

- In collaborative learning, students work jointly to achieve a shared objective (e.g., to solve a problem, to prepare a presentation)
- Collaborative learning is student-centered because students explore or apply the course material to create something new rather than simply “taking in” new information
- Benefits:
 - Enhanced problem-solving and critical-thinking skills
 - Increased motivation
 - Heightened creativity
 - Improved communication skills
 - Opportunities for social interaction
 - Boosted confidence
 - Increased accountability and responsibility for own learning



Implementing collaborative learning



- Have students discuss what contributes to effective group work
- Explain why working collaboratively is valuable
- Provide clear task instructions and expectations
- State the time-frame for the task
 - If the groups are expected to work together outside of class, give the students a few minutes at the end of class to plan their activities
- While students are working collaboratively in class, walk around and monitor to make sure students are not lost or confused
 - Encourage students to participate and ask questions if unsure

Problem-based learning

- Origins:
 - Use of cases at Harvard Medical School in the 19th century
 - John Dewey's philosophy of learning
 - Jerry Burner's discovery learning
 - Use of patients' cases at McMaster University Medical School (starting in 1969)
- Main assumptions:
 - Human beings are motivated to solve problems
 - Problem-solving is a process of seeking and learning whatever knowledge is needed to solve the problem



Implementing problem-based learning



- Find (or write) cases/problems that are appropriate for your purposes and motivating for your students
- Start with a simple case and model the problem-solving process with the whole class:
 - Identify the problem
 - Develop hypotheses about what causes the problem
 - Gather evidence to support or discount the hypotheses
 - Draw conclusions and make recommendations
- Point it out to the students that there are no right and wrong answers – but rather, more and less successful solutions
- As student work in groups, remember to facilitate the process by listening, questioning, clarifying, challenging, encouraging analysis, problem solving, and testing the validity of generalizations/solutions

Challenges of active learning



- It takes more time to plan active learning activities than to prepare a lecture
- It takes a shift in teacher identity to transition from the role as a lecturer to that of a facilitator who effectively supports students in more independent work
- In the beginning, learners may be resistant to participation in active learning, and they might need additional scaffolds (i.e., explicit support actions) from the teacher to complete the tasks
- Other challenges:
 - Room size and layout
 - **Noise and distractions**
 - **Organizing effective group work**

Dealing with noise and distractions

- Because in active learning, students interact with each other, you will end up with a noisy classroom environment
- However, noise itself is not necessarily a problem – it indicates student engagement
- Yet, you need to ensure that students stay on task (e.g., circulate through the room, monitor discussions, hold students accountable)
- Agree on a cue or a signal to get student attention (e.g., a timer, a clicker, a key phrase, or dimming lights)

Organizing group work

- In order to be successful, cooperative learning needs to be carefully organized and consistently monitored:
 - Start with pairs before moving to small groups to introduce cooperative learning gradually
 - Set the context for the activity using modeling and visuals
 - Set clear goals to give learners a purpose; include clear expectations about the use of the target language
 - Give exact directions for each step of the task – instructions should be as simple as possible
 - Provide directions orally and in writing (or with visuals) to appeal to different learning styles
 - Model the sequence of the activity in precise steps (e.g., teacher plays partner A, the whole class plays partner B)
 - Make sure students have the knowledge and language needed to accomplish the activity
 - Set a time limit (e.g., use a kitchen timer)
 - Circulate around the class to monitor, help solve problems as they arise, and keep learners on task

Group work: Other issues to consider

- What will be the product that results from the activity? Can this product be shared or evaluated?
- Can the groups find out immediately whether they have been successful or does the teacher need to follow up on the activity?
- If partners or groups finish their task early, how can the activity be extended so that they will be engaged while the rest of the class is finishing?
- What is the plan for dealing with a student who does not have a partner?
 - Will the teacher take the role of the extra partner? If so, how will the teacher deal with monitoring the other students?

Organizing group work: Student roles

- **Manager/timekeeper/Supervisor/Checker** – Organizes the group, keeps the group on task, makes sure everyone contributes
- **Recorder/secretary** – Records group answers
- **Spokesperson/speaker/reporter** – Reports back to the whole class
- **Encourager/praiser** – Reinforces group members for performing well or staying on task

Types of groups

- Pairs / Dyads – simple interaction with one classmate at a time; intimate and comfortable for most learners
- Small groups – prompt trust and cooperation, are fairly easy to facilitate, and are fairly comfortable for learners
- Large groups – require more monitoring and organization to ensure that everybody participates equally, provide more opportunities for interaction
- Temporary groups – usually fixed for one activity or one class period, require less monitoring and structure
- Permanent groups – suitable for longer projects, allow for more involvement and closer interpersonal relationships among members

Active Learning Strategies

- Refer to the handout:
 - **Active learning strategies**
 - Find 2-3 strategies that you would like to try in your classes
 - Commit to using the strategies in your teaching in the next 2-3 weeks or to adding them to your syllabus/course activities next semester



Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)

- Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are ungraded activities that provide instructors with information about to what degree students understand course material (i.e., formative assessment)
- CATs allow both teachers and students to reflect on the effectiveness of the course
- CATs can help teachers modify the course on an ongoing basis as needed
- By using CATs, instructors shows students that they care about student learning
- CATs help students monitor their own learning and prepare for summative assessment (e.g., tests, exams)

Examples of CATs

- Refer to the handout:
 - **Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)**
- Choose 2-3 examples of CATs from the handout and think about the following questions:
 - Have you used a similar technique in your teaching? How did it work?
 - Which technique do you think you could try using in one of your classes in the future and how would you implement it?



Testimonials

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oKwb8y6RQQ>



Summary



- Active learning allows students to engage with the course material, improve critical thinking skills, increase retention and motivation, and develop interpersonal skills
- However, making a transition from traditional, teacher-centered teaching to active teaching can be challenging for both teachers and students
- If you are new to active learning, consider introducing it into your teaching practices gradually – one small activity at a time
- Remember, there is no one pattern that fits all (teachers and students), and in many contexts, blended methods work best

Recommended Readings (available as PDF)

- Finkel, D. L., & Monk, G. S. (1983). Teachers and learning groups: Dissolution of the Atlas complex. In C. Bouton & R. Y. Garth (Eds.), *Learning in groups. New directions for teaching and learning*. Jossey-Bass.
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- Active and Collaborative Learning (n.d.). Center for Teaching Innovation. Cornell University. <https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/active-collaborative-learning>
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- McKeachie, W. J., & Svinicki, M. (2006). *Teaching Tips. Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Smith, B. L., & MacGregor, J. T. (n.d.). *What is collaborative learning?* Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education. <https://teach.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/WhatisCollaborativeLearning.pdf>