

Active Learning Techniques



Teaching Academy:
Resources for Promoting
Teaching Excellence

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Techniques	Level of thinking / skill focus	Description	Suitable phases of instruction	Suitable for large classes	Appropriate for traditional classrooms	Little to no preparation
Think-Pair-Share	any	Students take time on their own to consider a question, then their thoughts with a partner and after, optionally with the entire class.	introduction presentation practice	✓	✓	✓
Note-taking Pairs	understand	Students take time on their own to consider a question, then their thoughts with a partner and after, optionally with the entire class.	presentation	✓	✓	✓
Buzz Groups	understand	Students brainstorm or discuss a question or problem in small groups.	all	✓	✓	✓
Fish Bowl	any	A group of volunteer students have a debate, do a roleplay or perform a specific task in front of the class. The rest of the class watches and discusses at the end.	all	✓	✓	**
Think-Aloud Pair problem solving	apply problem solving	In pairs, students take turns listening while the other explains their solution and reasoning to a given problem.	practice application	✓	✓	**
Jigsaw	remember understand apply analyze	Students master content in small “expert” groups then reform into new groups and teach each other what they learned in their previous groups.	presentation	*	*	**
Advance Organizers	understand note-taking	Instructors provide a kind of template for taking lecture/reading notes to help them organize their notes and help them focus on big ideas and connections between them.	presentation	✓	✓	✓
Guided Notes	understand, note-taking	Instructors provide a set of partially-completed notes that students complete while listening to help them focus on big ideas.	presentation	✓	✓	✓
Translate That	understand	Instructors pause at regular intervals in a lecture and ask a student to explain the previous segment in “plain English” to their classmates.	presentation	✓	✓	✓
Analytic teams	analyze	Students are put into groups, and each member is assigned a role. Each role is a component of a complete analysis (i.e. Arguments for, arguments against, examples, opinions, etc.)	presentation practice	✓	*	✓
Sketch Note	understand	Students create a visual representation of lecture content	presentation practice	✓	✓	✓
Lecture Wrappers	understand self-regulated learning	At the end of a lecture, students identify the 3 most important points/big ideas and compare it to the instructor’s list.	presentation	✓	✓	✓
Peer Instruction	understand, apply	Students use response system (i.e. clickers) to answer questions. After voting, they explain their answer to a partner then vote again. Typically, the second round of voting sees better results as students learn from their peers.	presentation practice	✓	✓	**
Sequence chains	understand	Students fill in an instructor-generated graphic organizer based on reading and/or lecture that shows the relationship between ideas	presentation practice	✓	✓	**

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Fact or Opinion	critical thinking	Students identify what is fact and what is opinion from a reading or lecture.	presentation practice	✓	✓	**
IRAs	understand apply critical thinking	In response to a lecture or reading, students: explain Insights they've gained, identify an additional resource that has similar themes, and write how the reading applies to their own personal experience.	presentation practice	✓	✓	✓
Defining Features Matrix	understand	Students classify concepts, ideas & theories based on specific criteria	presentation practice	✓	*	**
Analytic Memo	analyze problem-solving	Students write a 1-2 page analysis of a problem/issue to a stakeholder.	application	✓	*	**
Group Grid	understand	Students sort course concepts into categories into an instructor-generated grid.	presentation	✓	*	**
Three-Minute Message	evaluate critical thinking	Students present a concise three-minute argument with supporting evidence on a designated course topic	practice application	✓	✓	✓
Directed Paraphrase	understand	Students craft a concise explanation of a difficult course concept in their own words for a specific audience	practice	✓	✓	✓
Invented Dialogues	analyze critical thinking	Students write dialogues between different characters (real or fictionalized depending on your topic) on controversial theories and issues.	application	✓	✓	✓
Documented Problem solving	problem-solving self-regulated learning	Students keep track of the steps they take as they solve a problem.	practice application	✓	✓	**
Structured Problem Solving	apply analyze problem-solving	Students work in teams to use a specific process to solve a complex problem	practice application	✓	*	**
Case Study	apply analyze evaluation	Students analyze an authentic scenario and apply course ideas to provide a solution	application	✓	*	**
Contemporary Issues Journal	apply analyze critical thinking	Students keep a journal where they connect course information to current news or their own lives.	application	✓	*	**
Send-a-problem	apply analyze evaluation	Students pass around envelopes with a problem or scenario written on the front. Groups discuss and put their solution into the envelope and pass it to the next group. This group provides their own solution without looking at the previous group's answer. Once a problem is in the third or fourth round, students remove the solutions and evaluate each and decide which is best and why.	practice application	✓	*	**
Post-It Parade	understand apply evaluation	Students put the answer to a question on a post-it note then stick it to a designated surface where it can be organized in a variety of ways.	introduction presentation practice	✓	✓	✓
Punctuated Lectures	self-regulated learning	The instructor pauses throughout the lecture and students reflect on what they were doing and why.	presentation	✓	✓	✓

Legend

*This technique requires students to work in small groups, so it will depend on your classroom configuration. See the lecture hall buzz group diagram to use small groups in a lecture hall.

**Preparation of task and/or materials required in advance



This resource was created by Concordia University's [Centre for Teaching and Learning](#). If you need help, please reach out to our teaching specialists at teaching@concordia.ca