Session Summary

Active learning is a pillar of teaching in higher education today. Students learn best when they are active participants in their own learning process. However, incorporating active learning strategies in the classroom can be daunting to new and seasoned faculty alike. There are many active learning techniques you can use to promote student engagement and enhance student learning in your classes.

Getting Started: The First 5 Minutes

- **Questions**: Posing a few focusing questions at the beginning of the class period is a great way to make students think about concepts they will cover that day. Give students a few minutes to provide preliminary answers to the questions to see what they already know. At the end of the class period, return to the questions so that students can develop answers and recognize that they have learned something and that their understanding of the material has grown throughout the session.

- **Retrieval Practice**: This activity requires students to recall what they have already learned to help them retain that information over time. At the beginning of class, ask students to remind each other what important points they learned in the last class session *without looking at notes or screens* (retrieval must come from memory). Your job is providing feedback to ensure accuracy and connect what students have learned already to what they will learn next. Repeat this exercise at the beginning of each class period.

- **K-W-L**: What students (think they) know before they enter a class influences what they take away from the class. Faulty knowledge hinders subsequent learning (students tend to resist new evidence that counters their existing ideas), so it is important to identify misconceptions. Identifying what students already know will help you to plan your classes around managing and improving upon student knowledge. Before learning new material, students write down what they already know about the topic (“K”). Then, students write down what they want to know about the subject (“W”). Finally, after learning the material, students write down what they learned (“L”). You could add a component to this process that asks students to reflect on how their understanding has evolved from “K” to “L.” (Reflection is an important learning activity.)

- **Focused Writing**: Having students participate in low-stakes writing provides each student with the opportunity to formulate responses, even if they don’t vocalize their ideas. Each of the previous three activities could benefit from having students write responses. You can collect written assignments or walk around the room to ensure students stay on task. You could grade them, count them for participation, or not include them in the course grade at all. Writing time should be limited (3-5 minutes), and students should keep writing until time is up. Beginning class with short writing tasks helps students focus and transition into learning.


Active Learning Techniques: An Overview

- **Think-Pair-Share**: “Think-Pair-Share (TPS) is a cooperative learning activity that can work in varied size classrooms and in any subject. Instructors pose a question, students first THINK to themselves prior to being instructed to discuss their response with a person sitting near them (PAIR). Finally, the groups SHARE out what they discussed with their partner to the entire class and discussion continues. Students get time to think critically, creating a learning environment that encourages high quality responses (Rowe, 1972).” See Kent State: [www.kent.edu/ctl/think-pair-share](http://www.kent.edu/ctl/think-pair-share)

View the presentation at [go.niu.edu/tai19](http://go.niu.edu/tai19)
• **Case Study:** “Cases are narratives, situations, select data samplings, or statements that present unresolved and provocative issues, situations, or questions (Indiana University Teaching Handbook, 2005). The case method is a participatory, discussion-based way of learning where students gain skills in critical thinking, communication, and group dynamics. It is a type of problem-based learning .... Students can work through a case during class as a whole or in small groups.” See U of I: citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/teaching-learning/resources/teaching-strategies/the-case-method

• **Jigsaw:** “Each member of the group is assigned a portion of an assignment or research project. Each member must research the material pertaining to their section of the project and be prepared to discuss it with their classmates. The Jigsaw strategy places great emphasis on cooperation and shared responsibility within groups.” See Penn State: www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/alex/jigsaw.pdf

• **Peer Review:** “Peer review — a process by which students give feedback on each other’s writing, presentations, or projects for the purpose of encouraging revision — can offer a great opportunity for students to take a step toward an in-progress final project. Not only can this help students to avoid leaving all of their work to the last minute, peer review can help you to model expectations for the final project, to allay student anxieties, and depending on your field, to model a ‘real’ feedback process.” See CUNY Baruch: ctl.baruch.cuny.edu/ideas-for-peer-review/

• **Fish Bowl:** “Fishbowl activities allow a student to practice a skill under peer review and audience. In the fishbowl activity, a group of students are chosen to discuss a given topic. The rest of the class watches, listens, or reads the transcript of the discussion. A secondary discussion occurs concerning the outcomes and process of the first.” See ION: www.ion.uillinois.edu/Resources/OTAI/Fishbowl.asp

• **Muddiest Point:** “As its name suggests, the Muddiest Point technique provides information on what students find least clear or most confusing about a particular lesson or topic. Instructors use that feedback to discover which points are most difficult for students to learn and to guide their teaching decisions about which topics to emphasize and how much time to spend on each.” See U-W Madison: blendedtoolkit.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Muddiest-Point.pdf

• **Gallery Walk:** “Gallery walk is an active teaching strategy that gets students out of their seats and moving around the classroom to different learning stations that display artifacts related to the class activities. A gallery walk is a good way to assess what students have learned about the content being taught. The artifacts of a gallery walk can be anything from open-ended questions about the content being taught, to photographs related to the content, or even to demonstrations or finished projects .... Each group visits each display station, taking notes on what they learn, then talking afterward to reflect upon their learning.” See Penn State: sites.psu.edu/pedagogicalpractices/gallery-walk/

• **Just-in-Time Teaching:** “Just-in-time teaching actively involves students in the learning process through a two-step series of learning activities. In the first step, students complete a focused set of activities outside of class ... and submit their work to the instructor. In the second step, the instructor ... collects the students’ responses and identifies areas of understanding and misunderstanding to adjust the next lesson so that students can receive specific ‘just-in-time’ feedback on those particular areas.” See U of I: citl.illinois.edu/citl-101/teaching-learning/resources/teaching-strategies/just-in-time-teaching

**Questions?**

Yvonne Johnson  
Multimodal Learning Coordinator  
yjohnson@niu.edu | 815-753-2690

Amanda Smothers  
Teaching and Learning Coordinator  
amanda.smothers@niu.edu | 815-753-5803

View the presentation at go.niu.edu/tai19