

Active Learning









Description

Active learning is the practical application of the theory of constructivist learning, in which students use new information and lived experience to form or modify their mental models. Instead of traditional lecture, which is a form of passive learning, active learning focuses on engaging students in the process of learning. Students engage in active learning when they reflect on their ideas and how they are using them regularly assess their comprehension, and gain knowledge through participation. This is accomplished through class discussion, group work, and problem-solving activities. Successful active learning in classrooms requires students to use metacognitive skills and critical thinking skills in order to judge their understanding and activate higher orders of thinking.

Why is this important?

There is ample evidence that active learning benefits students, especially students of low income or from underrepresented minority backgrounds. Multiple studies have demonstrated that active learning increases exam scores, reduces failure rates, improves self-efficacy, increases retention, and closes achievement gaps. However, traditional lectures still dominate college classrooms. Students often perceive they learn less in active learning environments as well, despite evidence to the contrary.

Implementation Examples

In-class polling		
Confidence ratings		
Exit polls		
Online discussion boards and chats		
Peer review*		
Skill tutorials and practice*		
In-class group work		
Instructor Activity Guides		

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*in select courses

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Sources: Deslauriers et al. (2019), Freeman et al. (2014), Michael (2006), Nguyen et al. (2021), Theobald et al. (2020)

Practical Applications

- ✓ Plan class-appropriate group activities aligned to course content, achieving a balance between challenging and achievable
- ✓ Explain purpose and benefits of active learning and normalize the struggle through material, emphasizing that struggle actually helps build cognitive skills
- ✓ Include deliberate, scaffolded instruction and practice to help students build metacognitive, cooperative, and critical thinking skills
- ✓ Ask questions in class and follow up by facilitating class discussion
- ✓ Facilitate group work to give students ample opportunity to learn from one another and practice articulating their knowledge to others
- ✓ Promote a culture of learning and inclusivity by laying ground rules for group work, building rapport with students, demonstrating interest in student success, and communicate confidence in their ability to meet high standards
- ✓ Solicit and use student feedback to continually improve course and build trust