

6 Tips for Creating Engaging Active Learning Experiences Online

One of the biggest challenges in teaching an online or hybrid course is keeping students actively engaged throughout each class. Whether your courses are being delivered synchronously or asynchronously, here are six tips to improve student engagement.



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and Track
Attendance



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1 Take *and Track* Attendance



Class attendance is one of the earliest predictors of **student success**¹. Yet many instructors note that online class attendance lags far below typical in-person attendance. You cannot engage students who are not present, so the first step is getting students to show up.

ENCOURAGING ATTENDANCE

- **Explain to students why you are tracking attendance** and the positive correlation between attendance and grades.
- **Give students credit for attendance** rather than penalizing them for missing class.
- **Provide students with a way to track their own attendance** so that you and your students are always on the same page.
- **Take attendance at the beginning of class and again at the end** to ensure that students are present the whole time. Or, end class with a polling question and give credit for answering it.

▶ HOW IClickER CAN HELP

- **Use iClicker's attendance functionality to automate attendance tracking.** Set the date, time, and location of your course and students will be reminded to "check in" 15 minutes before class begins.
- **Enable iClicker's optional geolocation feature** to ensure students are physically in class when they "check in." For online class sessions, disable this option.

2

Ask Opening Questions



Retrieval practice² is a great way to begin each class as it allows students to activate previous knowledge. This also helps instructors understand what students have retained from a previous class or pre-class assignment.

ASKING EFFECTIVE OPENING QUESTIONS

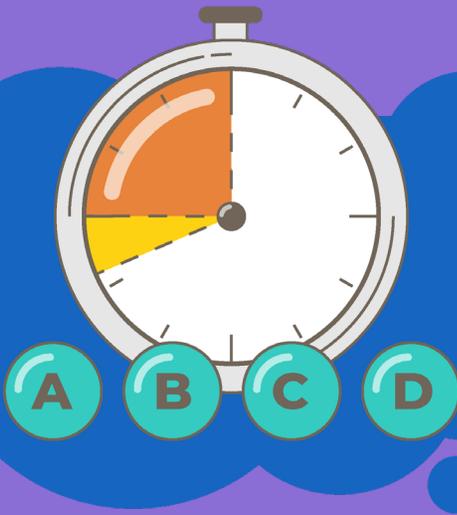
- **Make your opening question the first slide in your presentation.** Or, write the question on the board, a digital whiteboard, or ask the question verbally.
- **Display the question at the start of class** and remove it from view after a few minutes to encourage students to show up on time.
- **Start class with a question about material that was previously learned.** For example, begin with a question like, “Tell me one of the key concepts we learned from the last class.” or “Write a key takeaway from last night’s reading.”
- **Let students answer the opening question orally, in writing, or with a student response solution.** Give credit for answering the opening question.

▶ HOW iCLICKER CAN HELP

- **Use short answer questions in iClicker** to allow students to answer the question in their own words, rather than just selecting from multiple-choice options.
- **Share the opening question results with the class** and quickly review the key points to reinforce previously learned concepts.
- **Show the results of short answer questions as a word cloud** to illustrate the key concepts in students’ responses.

3

“Reset the Clock” with Polling Questions



Research indicates that students’ attention declines throughout the course of a lecture³. Distractions in a student’s ambient surroundings when in a remote environment can make concentrating even more difficult. “Chunking” content into segments is an effective instructional methodology to address this because it “resets” the attention span clock⁴. Beginning each content segment with a polling question activates students’ thinking by requiring them to engage with the content.

“RESETTING THE CLOCK” WITH POLLING QUESTIONS

- **Ask questions every 7 to 10 minutes** to reset attention spans.
- **Use questions to support content “chunking.”** Ask each student to answer the question, so every student’s clock is reset. A show of hands can work for this. A student engagement system makes this even easier, and allows you to track students’ responses and provide credit for participation.
- **Give points for answering each question** to motivate every student to participate, whether they respond correctly or not.

▶ HOW IClickER CAN HELP

- **Get started in minutes** with iClicker’s simple set-up and interface.
- **Deliver a variety of question types with a click of a button.** iClicker’s diverse question types (i.e. anonymous, short answer, target) support multimodal teaching, which has been shown to [improve engagement](#)⁵ and foster deep learning.
- **Know that iClicker’s student engagement solution** has been shown to [improve student outcomes](#)⁶.

4

Use the Socratic Method



Socratic questioning⁷—about fundamental or more advanced concepts—is a great way to engage students. A hallmark of the Socratic method is posing open-ended questions that require learners to think critically, rather than simply retrieving and reciting information the instructor has shared.

INTRODUCING THE SOCRATIC METHOD

- **Pose open-ended questions.** [Click here](#) for sample Socratic questions from R.W. Paul.
- **Allow students to answer questions using their mobile devices or laptop.** Show a visual of the results and use the results to identify and correct student misconceptions.
- **Ask students to discuss the results** and check to see if they would like to change their initial answer as they listen to one another's responses and rationales.
- **Use Socratic questions as anchors for small group breakout discussions.** When class sessions are online, many web-conferencing services allow instructors to create breakout rooms to facilitate small group discussion.

▶ HOW iCLICKER CAN HELP

- **Use the iClicker short answer question type.** They are perfect for open-ended, "Socratic" questions, allowing students to answer in their own words, rather than just selecting from multiple-choice options.
- **Show the results of short answer questions as a word cloud** to illustrate the key concepts in students' responses.
- **Use iClicker's Assignment feature** to ensure students have read the material prior to synchronous class sessions. Students' answers can reveal possible misconceptions that need to be addressed during the next class session.

5

Create On-screen “Action”



Sometimes a change of scenery is nice—and can help capture students’ attention. Using dynamic presentation tools and images makes for a livelier classtime and deeper student engagement.

CREATING ON-SCREEN “ACTION”

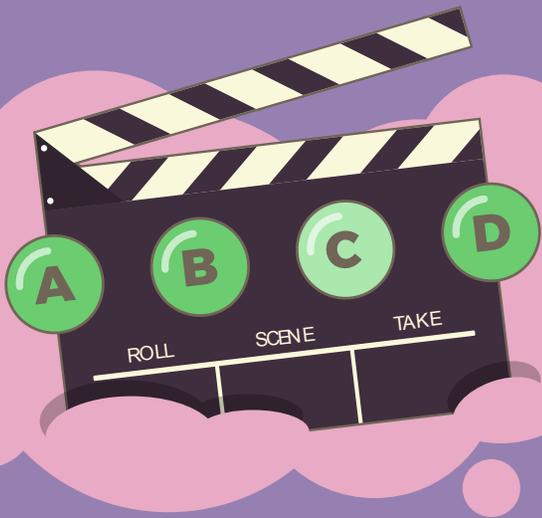
- **Use a ‘digital pencil’ to illustrate key concepts while speaking.** Many tablets and newer laptops have with drawing tools that replicate the “writing on the whiteboard” experience of an in-person class.
- **Move beyond static, text-heavy slides** by incorporating illustrations, YouTube videos, 3D modeling software, interactive presentation software like Prezi, or even memes.
- **Include “checkpoint” questions at the end of your pre-recorded lecture** to encourage students to pay careful attention and to help shape synchronous class discussions or asynchronous discussion board topics.

▶ HOW IClickER CAN HELP

- **Administer multiple question types** (short answer, target, numeric, multiple select) over any image on your screen with iClicker.
- **Ask about anything on your screen.** iClicker Cloud “floats” on top of any software application so you can pose questions—and track students’ answers—about anything you’re showing.
- **Administer low-stakes, formative assessments** (using iClicker’s assignment feature) that students can complete outside of class sessions. The feature can be used to support asynchronous learning or “flip” your in-person class sessions.
- **Add questions in your lecture videos** (with iClicker’s assignment feature) so students can answer questions on their own time.

6

Ask Closing Questions



Learning research suggests that awareness of learning enhances it⁸. Asking closing questions can be a simple, but effective cognitive tool to support deeper learning. Because closing questions illustrate how well students understand the concepts covered in class, you have an opportunity to clarify or provide additional resources where necessary.

ASKING EFFECTIVE CLOSING QUESTIONS

- **Finalize the class session** by asking a question about a key concept you just covered.
- **Assign participation points for answering the closing question** to encourage students to stay until the end of the class session—and reflect on their learning.
- **Review a summary of student responses** and use them to inform content or review coverage for the next class session.
- **Use discussion board or announcement features** to address any common misconceptions revealed by students' answers to the closing question.

▶ HOW IClickER CAN HELP

- **Deploy an exit poll with a single click in iClicker.** iClicker's exit polling feature asks students to rate their understanding of the content covered in class, giving you immediate insight into students' perceptions of their own understanding.
- **Use the iClicker assignments feature to get feedback on student confidence and preparedness.** It's an opportunity for your class to let you know how they're feeling about what you've been teaching and what lies ahead.

References

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