

Engagement Activities (from: Bean, Engaging Ideas)

“Minute Papers”

Pose a question to which students can respond, and give them 1 minute to write an answer.

For use as a primer, diagnostic, or simply to break up the monotony of a lecture to check for understanding and engagement.

This is a particularly interesting activity using technology (Google Forms, TopHat) so that you can return to the responses and even share some of the responses in subsequent classes. The same idea to be applied to questions asked during the course of a lecture (multiple choice, short answer) that are easily quantified to show as a graph or other visual representation of student answers.

Persuade the Professor

Introduce a major question or issue that your lectures have (or will) cover, telling students that not all scholars agree on one interpretation of the issue. Ask students to persuade you to one side or the other, using evidence from lectures and readings to back up their claims.

This exercise gives students an opportunity to own their thoughts and be proactive in sharing their ideas. It also forces them to consider why they think what they do, and gives the instructor an opportunity to catch errors in knowledge or understanding.

Believing/Doubting

Provide students with a statement, to which the students must first respond as though the statement is true (arguing in its favor), and then respond with a healthy dose of skepticism (doubting the statement’s legitimacy).

This is a good exercise for either a primer to introduce a new topic, or as a diagnostic either during or after a lecture in which essential information was presented. In either case, you can learn a great deal from student responses (e.g. How are they approaching the topic in the first place? Are they able to recall important information after the fact?).

Collaboration Activities (from: Barkley, Collaborative Learning Techniques)

Round Robin / Table

Groups of 4-6 students take turns responding to a question or prompt with a word, phrase or short statement that relates to the question. Primarily a brainstorming technique in which students generate ideas but do not elaborate, explain, or evaluate the ideas.

This is a great, short, activity to gauge recall of particularly important ideas or elements of broader topics. It's also a fairly low-stakes interaction, wherein students can participate in one word (with no defense of their ideas). If utilized in concert with technology, group answers could be shared immediately with the course, and further discussion might include which answers are best, which answers might be confusing, and which should not be considered in future.

Word Webs

Groups of 4-6 students generate a list of words in relation to a question or prompt (similar to a Round Robin), but then must relate those words to one another using salient information, drawing arrows to represent connections, and explaining (to one another or the class at large) why those connections exist.

Used as a primer, this activity could gauge level of engagement with assigned homework and/or prior knowledge when introducing new concepts. Used as a diagnostic or test-prep strategy, this activity can help provide students with new ways to understand the topics or issues discussed while simultaneously helping an instructor determine where students might misunderstand information.

Ship-It (or Send-A-Problem)

Each group of 2-4 students receives a problem, frames a solution, and then passes that information to the next group. That group can either a) evaluate the previous group's solution and critique/modify OR b) try to solve the same problem in a new way (without looking at the previous group's solution). The third and final group must determine if the solution is good, or determine which solution is best.

Particularly useful as a test preparation strategy, as instructors can develop problems that directly integrate materials/concepts learned in class.