

# Final Thoughts

# Overcoming Student Resistance to Active learning

- **To overcome student resistance to active learning**
- Begin using active learning strategies early in the term. Introduce the concept on the first day of class and let students know that they will be expected to participate in such strategies throughout the course.
- Be true to your word and use active learning frequently—at least once a class period initially. After the first several sessions, students will understand that you're serious about active learning and will accept their role as participants readily.
- Give clear instructions. State the goal students should meet, how much time they have for the activity, what procedures they should follow, and with whom they should partner (ie, "turn to the person next to you" or "form groups of four with the people nearest you.") It is often a good idea to put directions for in-class activities on an overhead or a PowerPoint slide so that students have something to refer to as they begin the activity.
- Explain to students why you're using active learning and the benefits they can expect from it.
- Be committed to your choice to use active learning and communicate that confidently to students. Students will be put at ease if they understand that you're in charge and have good reasons for what you're doing.
- Manually break students into groups. This can be an effective way to overcome student reluctance and demonstrate that you're in charge.
- Start small and simple. Use low-impact strategies such as think-pair-share or in-class writing exercises. These strategies are easy to implement, take only a few minutes, and are "low stakes" for students who may be unsure or uncomfortable. As you and your students gain experience, you may decide to graduate to more involved activities. For ideas, see our [Active Learning Strategies](#) list

- **To counter student complaints about active learning**
- Address student complaints about active learning immediately and with confidence. Keep your comments positive.
- Explain to your classes why you're using active learning. Highlight what students have to gain from such activities. Consider making such an announcement early in the term and reprising it later if necessary.
- See student complaints about active learning as "teachable moments" that offer students opportunities to reflect on how they learn and how to improve those learning skills.

- **To maintain control of your classroom during active learning**
- It is not necessary to devote your entire session to active learning. You can still lecture. In fact, a mix of instructional methods—lecturing for ten or fifteen minutes followed by a three or four minute active learning interval—is an extremely effective technique. It's also very easy to implement and doesn't require a great deal of additional preparation.
- When starting out with active learning, keep it short and simple. Use low impact strategies such as think-pair-share or focused writing. They are easy to implement and almost certain to be successful. After you've gained confidence using active learning, progress to longer, more involved activities (such as group cooperative learning) if these meet your instructional needs.
- Just because students are "active" (i.e., talking to one another or engaging in some other activity) doesn't necessarily mean they will learn anything. Simply putting students in groups doesn't constitute active learning. Any activity you choose must be well planned and executed.
- When planning and presenting active learning strategies to your students, make sure to consider four elements: the goal of the activity, the outcomes you expect of students, the procedure they should follow, and the time limit for the activity.
- Consider using strategies to keep control of the classroom during active learning activities. These might be ringing a bell or flashing the lights to gain students' attention.

- **To manage time pressures when using active learning**
- Consider your learning objectives carefully. Based on them, what content is most important for students to master?
- Consider what content you must cover in class and what content students can cover outside of class by themselves. It may be necessary to create assignments, activities, or other support to help students master material on their own.
- Attempt to use one or two brief active learning strategies during your lectures. Space the activities throughout the lecture to break it up and keep students engaged.
- Attempt to use classroom assessment techniques to determine what students are learning and what is confusing them. These can help you decide when (and whether) you need to spend more time working with particular material.
- Avoid racing through material to "finish it all" by the end of the period. This is almost always counterproductive. Students tend to become overwhelmed and discouraged.
- Remember that just because you say it, doesn't mean they learn it. If student learning is your goal, resolve to spend more time on less material.

- **To handle dysfunctional groups**
- Successful cooperative learning doesn't just happen. It takes careful planning, a well designed activity, and an instructor who is willing to intervene to help groups function properly.
- Design group activities to include positive interdependence, independent accountability, face-to-face interaction, use of group social skills, and group processing.
- Assign group roles for students. Explain these clearly at the outset of the activity.

- **To ensure quality peer review of writing**
- Recognize that peer reviews often falter because students fail to understand the process of peer review or they lack buy in to the concept. Develop strategies to address these concerns in your students.
- Teach students how to conduct a peer review. Focus on the reasons for doing them, the process to follow, and how to give (and receive) constructive feedback.
- Create a rubric or checklist for students to use during peer review.
- Grade students' revision and peer review work. Consider portfolio grading or having students submit a revision essay outlining the comments they offered their peers and how they used peer comments to improve their own writing.
- Intervene as quickly as possible when groups struggle with peer review.
- Make it clear to your students that they should not expect to rely solely on the instructor's comments for their reviews. Peer commentary is important.

# references

- University of Minnesota,
- **Center for Teaching and Learning**  
University Office Plaza, Suite 400, 2221  
University Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414