



Faculty and Curriculum Development Centre

## Active learning methods

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# Using Active Learning Methods

When we talk about active learning methods, we're talking about encouraging students to participate in their learning. As Beverly Cameron notes in *Active Learning*, we're asking students to "use content knowledge, not just acquire it" (Cameron, pg. 9, 1999). In that way, it's easy to see that there are already a lot of active learning techniques in use at OCAD U, particularly in our studio courses. The following active learning techniques are additional strategies that you can add to your repertoire.

**Icebreakers:** There are many variations on icebreaker activities. Icebreakers are useful activities to get students talking on the first day of class. By introducing themselves to one another, they create an immediate sense of community in the classroom. To add some more icebreaker examples to your collection, browse the free ebook, *40 Icebreakers for Small Groups*:

[http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40\\_icebreakers\\_for\\_small\\_groups.pdf](http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf)

**Minute-paper:** A minute-paper is a way for students to provide a stream of conscious response to a question, problem, or prompt, in one minute. Try minute-papers to gauge how well students understand the main concept of a lecture, use it as a form to collect mid-course feedback, or explore minute-papers as a way for students to reflect on their learning. The Centre for Enhancement in Teaching and Learning has a great resource on minute papers: <http://provost.tufts.edu/celt/files/MinutePaper.pdf>

**Four corners:** This is an activity that works very well when students need to state an opinion on a topic. Each corner of the room is labelled: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree*. When students pick a corner, they share their ideas with people in that group. The University of Regina's Centre for Teaching & Learning can provide you with more information: <http://www2.uregina.ca/ctl/2011/03/09/four-corners-teaching-strategy/>

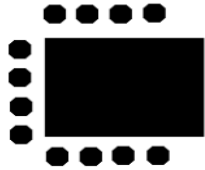
**Quescussion:** In this activity, a student who is designated as the leader begins by asking a question, and students respond in question form. One of these questions can then be developed as the starting point for a deeper conversation. Read more about Quescussion in this excerpt from *Teaching Large Classes*: [http://www.iupui.edu/~idd/active\\_learning/quescussion.html](http://www.iupui.edu/~idd/active_learning/quescussion.html)

**Think-Pair-Share, Snowball, Fishbowl, and Jigsaw:** These techniques are unique takes on discussions for large and small groups. A guide for how to implement these techniques is available to you through the Centre for Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo: [http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching\\_resources/tips/group\\_work\\_types\\_of\\_small\\_groups.html](http://cte.uwaterloo.ca/teaching_resources/tips/group_work_types_of_small_groups.html)

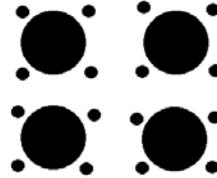
**Group Concept Maps:** Concept maps are a method for students to find relationships between ideas (this activity is especially useful when students need to organize ideas for a paper). You can encourage students to create concept maps together as a form of group brainstorming, and you can also innovate this strategy by asking students to create a group concept map without talking to one another. Refer to Brigham Young University's Centre for Teaching and Learning to learn more about the framework and tools specific to concept mapping: <http://ctl.byu.edu/tech-tips/concept-mapping>

Use these active learning methods to help you to reconceptualise the classroom space and how students interact within it. This might mean reorganizing furniture in one of the following ways, of course there are many other variations you can try depending on the type of active learning method employed.

#### Horseshoe Table



#### Small Group Tables



#### Debate Tables



#### Boardroom Table



#### References

Cameron, Beverly. (1999). *Active Learning*. The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Halifax, N.S.

**For more information, contact the Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre:**



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