3 ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR THE SOCIALLY DISTANCED CLASSROOM: GROUPWORK

ℹ What's involved?

▶ Things to Consider

Meaningful Collaboration & Discussion

Set up a single shared 'class' form for your session using MS Forms or OneNote and ask students to work with the nearest person (within a 2-meter distance) to discuss and capture their 'shared' responses to pre-set discussion questions on the shared form. This could also easily be captured via a class discussion board or MS Teams chat.

It is a good idea to release discussion questions ahead of the face-to-face session leaving enough time to allow students to research key topics (i.e. set reading). Keeping the shared form 'live' post-session can also encourage continued student engagement with key topics through asynchronous contributions in response to 'follow-up' discussion questions focused around key learning.

Collaborative notetaking tools are a useful means of encouraging student engagement around face-to-face discussion activities that don't require students to leave their physical seats.

Monitor class progress throughout the activity via a seperate device to get a sense of responses. Once all questions have been covered facilitate a whole-class discussion exploring key themes.

It can also be useful to encourage students to record any questions they might have regarding the task or topics directly on the form. This will allow you to respond to any general issues or misunderstandings at a group level. Using such tools in face-to-face sessions also creates a record of student input and progress that can be revisited at a later date.

Encouraging Interaction Around Key Ideas

Make use of live polling or quiz tools to provide students with regular opportunities to gauge their understanding of topics and concepts and to discuss course material. Using tools like Socrative during face-to-face (and online) sessions can boost engagement by quickly checking student knowledge, promoting in class participation and providing timely (formative) feedback.

Consider framing student interactions with key ideas using quick quiz-style exercises at the beginning and/or the end of a session as a way of gathering insight into student progress and identifying gaps in knowledge. This instant feed can be used to inform the content and flow of sessions by addressing gaps in real-time, through dialogue and targeted work.

Live polling and quizzes are an effective means of gathering actionable data regarding student learning. Tools like Socrative offer a range of question formats (i.e. MCQs, single-right answer, short-answer). It is important you give careful thought to the kinds of information you wish to capture and whether it is timely, relevant, and useful given your learning objectives.

Using Microsoft Forms, with its ability to add branching questions and sections, to ask more complex questions can provide means to generate structured interaction and collaboration around key ideas in-class. The Form might be completed either prior to or at the beginning of a session, providing the basis for more focused discussion around emergent themes and ideas. A visual summary of responses is provided and all data can be saved and exported.

Scenario or Problem Tasks

Create 2-3 scenarios capturing real-life illustrations of a topic or problem and ask students to chose 1-2 scenarios and report how they would respond. This can be easily facilitated by sharing each scenario with students as a Blackboard resource or via Microsoft Teams and asking them to document their thoughts on a discussion board or online chat using their own devises. Student contributions can then form the basis for a whole-class discussion of each scenario in turn.

To encourage extended interaction and discussion set up each scenario as a separate 'Breakout Room' (through the channel feature available on MS Teams) and ask students to document their thoughts for all scenarios/problems within a set period of time. Responses can then be reviewed, in turn, with the class.
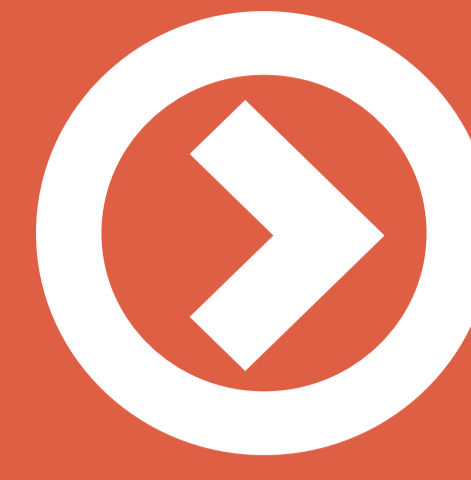
Backchannelling student interaction using online text chat during face-to-face sessions provides a forum for supplemental discussions among students. This also serves a broader universal design purpose by providing a written alternative to spoken discussions which some students can find challenging and uncomfortable.

Consider using collaborative tools like Microsoft OneNote or Padlet to facilitate cooperative group work on a scenario or problem task. These tools allow groups of students to work on producing a shared response to a scenario or problem by collating and co-editing content that can be easily shared with the wider class. You can then review all contributions and highlight a few responses to share with the full group along with your comments reflecting on and synthesizing the student ideas.

👁 Some practical tips to keep in mind

When Planning Sessions

Provide clear instructions for any in-class activities that all students can access prior to and during the session. This will avoid confusion around what students are being asked to do and optimise your time together. Instructions can be placed online to allow reference back to tasks/sessions at later points in the module.

Manage expectations regarding student involvement by setting some clear and simple parameters for participation - i.e. every student should try to contribute at least once to tasks set. You could also include that students should try and comment on the contributions of at least two of their peers.

Think about the timings and sequencing of activities to ensure all students are clear on how long they have to work on tasks during the session and that the activities you set are manageable in the timeframe available. Take a module-wide view when planning face-to-face activities to ensure tasks remain relevant and appropriately aligned to learning outcomes and assessment crtieria.

When Delivering Sessions

Create and allow space for practice and rehearsal of the activities and tasks you choose to utilise during face-to-face sessions. Practicing and replicating activities across multiple (face-to-face and online) sessions can help to build student familiarity with and confidence in contributing to class-based activities - this is particularly important when utilising a range of different digital learning tools. Repetition of tasks can also create space to revisit and reconsider previous work in light of new insights and developments.

Monitor Progress by setting up ways of capturing student contributions to in-class activities. Asking students to make notes in a collaborative (online) document and to pose any questions that might emerge during a task means you can be responsive to the specific needs of the group. You will need to ensure you have shared documents open during the session so you can review progress. This also creates a record that can be referred back to later. You may also want to consider adding an additional bonus task or question to stretch those students/groups who might finish before others in the group.

📖 Where can I find further support and guidance?

See LTE Online for a range of accessible support and guidance on active learning strategies in the context of online and hybrid learning.

The Principles of Course Design for Hybrid Learning toolkit is designed to contextualise the Hybrid Learning model to the nature of your subject discipline.