

40 Active Learning Strategies for Active Students

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One of the most obvious ways to increase your classroom charisma is to increase the amount of active learning in your class. Not only will you find it easier to keep students engaged during one of the most difficult times of the year (the warm weather days of spring), but you will find that your students will retain information with greater ease and with more success.

1. Have students lead conferences with each other and with you. When students take the lead, their interest and confidence soars. Prepare a set of guidelines that encourage them to take the lead in designing effective conferences and then allow them to assume responsibility for their role as conference

facilitators.

2. When you are delivering instruction, pause frequently and have students write a summary of what you have said in the previous 3-5 minutes.

3. Brainstorm ideas. There are many effective ways for students to create brainstorms of ideas. Working with pairs or in small groups tends to be effective because students stimulate each other's thought processes. Encouraging students to think out of the box and to delve into a topic using this technique often has unexpectedly positive results.

4. When students have a passage, chapter, or other text to read, guide them through it with active learning strategies such as these:

- o A scrambled list of events to put in order
- o A list of statements for students to agree or disagree with
- o A list of people and places to match with information about them
- o A cause-and-effect chart
- o Give students a set of questions that they will answer as they read the text. Discuss the questions before they read in order to see what information they already have. Help them see how the questions are aligned with the text and how they should answer them.
- o Give students a checklist of the key points to watch for so that they can check them off as they find them while reading.

5. Have students solve mysteries. One-minute mysteries, simple puzzles, even riddles make learning fun as well as involving students in active learning pursuits. An excellent resource to explore for mysteries for your students is the site <http://www.mysterynet.com>. Another good site for brain teasers and other short puzzles for students is <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/braint.htm>.

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6. Allow students opportunities to independently read selections of their own choosing. Independent reading is an important way for students to broaden the scope of their background knowledge.

7. Ask the entire class an interesting general question that relates to the topic under study. Have them write notes about how they will respond. Discuss the question once most of the students have had a chance to respond. Allowing students to write their answers before they discuss encourages participation.

8. Have students participate in small group Round Robin activities. Have students form groups of threes or fours. While there are many different ways to manage a Round Robin, one way that many teachers have found effective is to have students pass around a sheet of paper with each child writing a fact or opinion or other bit of information on the sheet until either time is called or they have reached a certain number of entries. This allows students to share their knowledge in a nonthreatening way as well as see what their classmates know about the topic.

9. As soon as you have discussed a general question as a whole group, have students then jot down what they heard that they agree with, disagree with, or that gave them a new idea.

10. When you have students work together in pairs, time them. Students who know that they have only a short time to work together will focus better than those students who think that they and their partners have all class long to work.

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11. Ask students to involve themselves in their learning by using review strategies such as these:

- o Associate body motions with the material
- o Quiz themselves
- o Use colored pens to rewrite the main ideas
- o Recite or sing the information
- o Create mnemonic devices
- o Teach the information to a classmate
- o Create a vivid image of the topic
- o Restate information in their own words
- o Create a quiz and give it to a classmate

12. Have students make flashcards and use them to study together. Flashcards with sketches or drawings are more effective than those where the words are just written out in haste.

13. Ask students to model the right way to do something or answer a question. Peer models can be powerful motivators.

14. If your subject matter lends itself, have students role play in brief sketches.

15. Do a Whip Around. Have students stand and quickly recite a fact or other item from the lesson before sitting down.

16. Go to this fun site: <http://www.darwinawards.com> and browse until you find a story that would appeal to your students. Print the story. Cut it into strips, mix them up, and have students put them back into order. The innate appeal of these silly stories will appeal to students with a sense of humor.

17. Offer students opportunities to learn their vocabulary words and other facts in puzzles of various types. The easiest site to use for this is <http://www.puzzlemaker.com>.

18. Have students use a site such as <http://www.surveymonkey.com> to create and administer their own free surveys about a topic your class is studying.

19. Have your students stage a talk show to interview characters from fiction or history or in any other discipline. Choose an outgoing and reliable student to be the host, and let that student interview other students, who pose as guests.

20. Have students sit in a circle. To play, one student begins a story, stops after a few sentences, and then points to another student, who continues the story. You can adapt this activity to teach vocabulary, order of events, facts, or other information.

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21. Set up a quiz bowl tournament of quick questions and answers involving as many of your students as possible. To add interest, vary the level of difficulty, rules of play, way of scoring, and incentives.

22. When students have to read a passage, a nonfiction article, their text, or even a newspaper, give them a list of names, events, people, and other items to search for as a scavenger hunt activity. When students work in groups, this is particularly effective.

23. Have students move to work with a partner to interview each other about the topic under study. If they have already completed the day's work, they can ask questions about the material they just studied. If they are just beginning the lesson, the interview questions can be designed to determine what they already know about the topic. The questions can be generated by their teacher or by students themselves.

24. Design your own board game to fit your topic. You can make small boards and photocopy them for students to use in a small group, or you can make a large board for the entire class to use. The tasks you assign your students in a board game can range from simply answering questions to solving problems. Students also enjoy creating and playing their own board games.

25. Play Twenty Questions. Write an answer on a slip of paper, then have students take turns asking a question each until they guess the answer. Keep track of the number of questions that they have to ask in order to guess correctly. In this game, the lowest number of questions wins.

26. Play Name That Person. This game is similar to Twenty Questions in that students try to guess answers with as few clues as possible. You should make up the clues in advance. On game day, you'll call them out one at a time until someone can name the targeted person, battle, city, or other item.

27. Chain Making is an educational version of the old alphabet game that small children play. One player begins thinking of an object relating to the unit of study and beginning with the letter "A." The next student has to repeat that clue and add an object with the letter "B." The game continues until students are stumped or until they reach the end of the alphabet.

28. Many teachers use Bingo to review vocabulary words. Photocopy a game board with sixteen or twenty-five blanks. Give students a list of words to place in the blanks. They can use bits of paper to cover the words when you call out definitions.

29. Play Hangman. In the traditional version, students guess letters in a word or phrase to keep the figure "alive." In other versions, students can give correct answers to short-answer questions or define vocabulary terms.

30. Hold sporting events. Divide your students into teams, and use the chalkboard to play games of football, soccer, or whatever sport currently interests to your students. Students advance by correctly answering questions or completing assigned tasks.

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31. Stage a fishbowl question and discussion group. Select a few students to sit in the center of a discussion group and have the rest of the class sit around them. Have the discussion group answer the questions posed by the larger group. Rotate students in and out of the fishbowl discussion group.

32. Divide the class into two groups. Have one group read the day's text lesson independently while you teach the others crucial information from the lesson. Have the groups then pair up with each other and exchange the information they have learned.

33. Ask students to create questions that they believe could possibly stump their classmates.

34. Give students a brief passage and have them read it silently. Then ask them to comment on the passage or answer questions about it. After this, have them mingle until they have found three other students who can concur with their comments or answers.

35. Post signs around the room for the various stages of the day's lesson if it involves independent work or practice. Students will stay focused on learning longer if they are allowed to move from spot to spot, completing a set number of activities at each area. This would be particularly effective for a drill of mixed or cumulative information such as the skills needed to perform various types of math calculations or practice in sentence writing or even the various parts of a history unit.

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36. Exit tickets have been around for a long time because their appeal to students and teachers alike is powerful. Try some of these sentence starters to engage all of your students. You could even post these for students to refer to during class.

- Today I learned...
- I was surprised when...
- I'm beginning to wonder...
- I think I will...
- I would have liked...
- Now I understand
- Class would be more interesting if...
- I can be more successful in this class if I...
- I wish...

37. Invite students to stretch their imagination by asking them to do something that appears to go against the grain: write a sentence with five errors, write a history timeline with six mistakes, design a structure that is certain to collapse, or do a set of math problems with a certain number of them incorrect.

38. Give students a general topic and have them form study groups about it before the formal learning about it begins. They can do research, find examples, predict the main points, or complete other free-flowing activities that expose them in a general way to the material and provide background knowledge in a way that engages students fully. Their research can be online or with materials that you provide.

39. Have students identify the various characteristics of something under study, classify the main points, or even match up questions and answers by first placing each component of their assignment on a note card. They then mingle until they find other students who match their topic. If the material under study lends itself, students in a group can then categorize themselves according to various criteria.

40. Have students make Power Point presentations or slide shows as a review of the material that they are studying in class. When they present their show to the entire group, everyone benefits.