



# About These Cards

Active learning is “anything that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). It engages students with the course material through discussions, problem solving, case studies, role plays, and other methods. These cards provide 50 active learning strategies to use in your class.

These cards can serve as a resource for your teaching, whether pulling one at random or using them as a reference when planning your course. Note some cards may involve more preparation than others.



# Four Corners

- Post questions, quotes, photos, etc. with a space to respond next to the materials along with a marker in each corner of the classroom
- Assign students to each corner
- Have students discuss their corner's posted information and write a comment in the area for responses
- After having some time to reflect, signal students to move onto the next corner



# Minute Paper

- Provide a short prompt that encourages reflection or recall
- Ask students to take out a piece of paper and spend 1-5 minutes writing a response to the prompt
- Assure them that polished work is not needed; raw, first draft thoughts are most important
- Read over the responses and create a list of common themes across them, summarize key ideas discussed, and make note of any misconceptions or errors which will need to be clarified



# Think Pair Share

- **THINK:** Pose a question to the class. Have students think of a response, independently
- **PAIR:** Group students into pairs
- **SHARE:** Each student explains their response to their partner. The partner can ask for clarification if they don't understand or agree with the response
- **Variation:** Allow students to share across their pairs in a whole class debrief following the above "Share" step



# Multiple Choice

- Assign students to work in pairs or small groups with a series of multiple-choice cards (A, B, C, D) provided to each group
- Provide the class with a multiple choice question
- Each group will discuss and come to a consensus answer
- Signal to have all groups raise their answer card simultaneously
- Allow groups to justify their answer, respond, and provide constructive critiques
- Confirm/clarify correct answers



# Parallel Lines

- Form two rows of students that are facing each other. One row will be the "speakers" and the other the "listeners"
- Give students a topic for discussion and set a time limit for speakers to share their ideas while the listener practices active listening (no interrupting)
- Once time is up, listeners and speakers reverse roles
- Direct one line to move right so each student has a new partner and repeat with new/same topic



# Jigsaw

- **Becoming Experts:** Form temporary student groups and provide a topic for them to gain expertise on
- **Sharing Expertise:** Form new groups with at least one "expert" on the provided topics. Each expert will briefly explain what they learned on their topic
- **Apply Expertise:** Students complete a task that requires them to apply their newfound expert knowledge (completing a worksheet, diagram, or poster)





## On the Line

- Designate one side of the classroom as Strongly Agree and one side as Strongly Disagree
- Read statements that allow room for discussion and disagreement
- Allow 1 minute after you read the statement for students to move to an area that represents their level of agreement
- Allow debate between people standing in different areas
- Encourage students to move places after discussion if their opinions have changed



## **Vote Up-Down**

- Place pre-written topics on poster-boards or paper around the classroom
- Provide students with stickers, sticky notes, or markers for voting
- Ask students to “vote” on statements they agree with the most by using up their limited supply of votes or by asking them to mark a tally mark on the posterboard
- Have a discussion afterwards focusing on the most voted topic



# Ask the Winner

- Ask students to independently solve a problem provided on the board
- Revealing the answer, have students who answered correctly raise their hands
- Instruct all the students who don't have their hand raised to find a peer who does, the "winner"
- Have each "winner" explain how they answered the question and allow peers to ask questions for clarification and understanding



# True or False

- Write true or false statements on a set of index cards (one statement per card)
- Distribute index cards (one to each student)
- Students must decide if their index card is one of the true or false statements
- Students can raise their hand if they believe their index card is true. Alternatively, split the room in half and have students move to one side for true and the other for false



# Concept Map

- Have students write keywords from a unit or lesson onto sticky notes
- Instruct students to organize their sticky notes from general to specific, clustering ideas or terms that are similar to one another
- Tell students to draw arrows or lines to connect the clusters that contain words that are related
- Words or phrases can be written along these lines to explain the relationship between the clusters



# Word Journal

- Have students reflect on a unit or topic
- Then, instruct students to summarize the entire topic on their paper with a single word
- Finally have students write a short paragraph to explain their word choice
- Students can share this at the end of the lesson with a partner(s) and compile all word journal entries as a reflection on the entire course at the end of the semester



# Major Connection

- Near the end of class, instruct students to get out something to write with
- During last 15 minutes of class, ask students to write a short article about how the point applies to their major
- Allow time for sharing, especially if students of different majors are in the same space to pinpoint intersectionality in the lesson



# Chain Notes

- Distribute blank index cards
- Write a question related to the learning environment on an empty envelope and pass it around (e.g., Are the group discussions useful? What feels important? What questions do you still have?)
- Instruct students to write a very brief answer to the question on their index card
- Have students drop their answer into the envelope and pass it on to the next student





## Do-Si-Do

- Students complete pair work or discussion in groups of 2
- Students then count off by twos
- Instruct all of the 2's to stand up and find a new partner (the 1's stay seated and raise their hands until a new partner comes)
- Students debrief what was said with the first partner
- Variation: Later, all the 1's come together in a large circle for a group debrief, while the 2's have their own circle



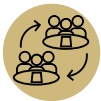
# Psychoanalysis

- Students get into pairs and interview one another about a recent learning unit
- The focus of the interview should be analysis of the material
- Sample Interview Questions:  
What were your attitudes/beliefs before learning this topic? How did your attitudes/beliefs change after learning about this topic? How will your actions/decisions alter based on your learning of this topic? How have your perceptions of events changed?



# Get One, Give One

- Students fold a piece of paper in half and write “Give One” on one side and “Get One” on the other
- On the “Give One” side, have them write four insights from today’s material, then stand up and find a partner
- Each student shares one idea from their “Give One” side of the paper and writes down one idea from their partner on the “Get One” side
- Continue until their paper is full of new ideas!



# World Café

- Create individual stations with one student host per station and all other students split between stations
- At the stations, small groups tackle the same driving question and have a plenary debrief
- Then, everyone except the hosts find a new table & new groups for a second discussion question
- The host leads discussions and draws ideas between rounds, taking notes on sticky wall posters or on a table poster



# Brain Drain

- Put students into groups of 5-6
- Hand out an empty grid of 6 rows and 3 columns to every student with a prompt or task at the top to brainstorm
- Each person brainstorms 1-3 possible answers, one per column in row 1
- After 3 minutes, have students rotate papers clockwise and work on row 2 (but do not repeat any answers from row 1)
- Continue until sheet is filled in, debrief to find the best answers



# Balloon Pop

- Create inflated balloons with a task or problem trapped inside on a piece of paper
- Allow students in groups to pick a balloon
- At the signal, all groups pop their balloons
- Students race to finish their task or problem the fastest out of all groups
- Note: some students might have sound sensory issues. One noiseless option is to put tasks in some sealed envelopes instead



# Things You Know

- Create envelopes with cut-up strips of paper with the topics/concepts they should know about already
- Give an envelope to every student
- Instruct students to divide their stack into two piles: things they know well, and things they need help with
- Then, allow students to debrief with other nearby students on things any of them need help with



# Pass the Problem

- Divide students into groups
- Give the first group a case or a problem and ask them to identify (and write down) the first step in solving the problem or analyzing the case
- Pass the problem on to the next group and have them identify the next step
- Continue until all groups have contributed
- Note that you can have as many problems as groups so no group is waiting for their turn





# Movie Application

- In groups, students discuss examples of movies that made use of a concept or event discussed in class
- Instruct student to try to identify at least one way the movie-makers got it right, and one way they got it wrong
- Allow time for some cross group connection to share ideas out as whole class at the end of the activity



# Lecture Reaction

- Divide the class into four groups after a lecture:
  - Questioners (must ask two questions related to the material)
  - Example givers (provide applications)
  - Divergent thinkers (must disagree with some points of the lecture)
  - Agreers (explain which points they agreed with or found helpful)
- Finish by briefing the whole class



# Blender

- Students silently write a definition or brainstorm an idea for several minutes on paper
- Then they form into groups, and two of them read their ideas and integrate elements from each
- A third student reads theirs, and again integration occurs with the previous two, until finally everyone in the group has been integrated (or has attempted integration)



# Rank Alternatives

- Provide a situation or problem to all students
- Give some time for all students to think up as many alternative courses of action (or explanations of the situation) as possible
- Have students share their ideas as a whole class where you compile list on whiteboard or document
- In groups, have students discuss and rank them by preference
- Optionally allow students to defend their rankings to class



# Sticky Discussion

- Divide students into cooperative groups and have them read individually
- Ask them to use sticky notes to mark places that they want to talk about in the text
- Then direct them to reread as a group and discuss the parts they have marked.



# Pictionary

- For important concepts and terms, have students play Pictionary
- One student draws an image representing the concept or term
- The rest must guess the term
- After guessing, allow some time for review of the term if needed
- Variation: Split the class into two groups and play Pictionary between the groups. Have students compete to see which group guesses correctly first



# Super-Password

- For important concepts and terms, have students play Super Password
- Prepare cards with key term and “forbidden words” that cannot be used to explain the key term
- One student tries to get their partner to say the key term and cannot say any of the “forbidden words” to get partner to guess
- Variation: Can be made into a larger group activity for competitions



# Scrabble

- Use the chapter (or course) title as the pool of letters from which to make words (e.g., mitochondrion)
- Create teams with student groups
- Allow teams to brainstorm as many words as possible from that list, but all words must be relevant to the test or unit
- Variation: play scrabble on boards afterward





## Who Am I?

- Tape a term or name on the back of each student, out of view
- Each student then wanders about the room, posing yes/no questions to the other students to guess the term on his own back
- Variation: Instruct students they may only ask one question per person to add difficulty to the student to student interactions



## Exit Ticket

- At the end of class, ask students to write a short summary of the lecture
- Variations:
  - Ask students to provide one new personal significant learning outcome (in 3-5 sentences)
  - Ask students to share things they still have questions or wonderings about
- Students turn in responses as they leave to earn credit



# Student Questions

- Place students into groups of 3-4
- Ask students to take five minutes to decide on the one question they think is crucial to be answered right now
- Collect questions and answer them on the spot or answer at the beginning of the next class
- Variation: Use this as an exit ticket activity (see Exit Ticket card)



# Fishbowl

- Ask students to stand up and form a big circle
- Invite a few students to step into the middle of the circle to be discussion leaders
- Discussion leaders unpack their ideas and thoughts about a class topic of choice while students in the outer circle take notes and write a response
- Encourage students on the outside to “tap out” students in the middle, taking their place in the middle circle to discuss



# Solo-Team-Teach

- SOLO: Each student solves the same practice problem alone
- TEAM: Assign students to a team and direct the students to share their answers with other members (if team members do not all agree, they will work together through the question to come to a consensus)
- TEACH: For each problem assigned to a group, select one student from a group to “teach” the class how they solved the problem



# Gallery Walk

- Write different questions or problems on chart paper and post them around the room
- Assign students to a group, each with a different color marker
- Each group moves to a poster and writes in their joint response
- After, signal groups to move to the next poster until all the questions have been answered
- Once all questions have been answered, use them as prompts for deeper class discussion



# Great Debate

- Stage a debate around a disputable question or statement related to a learning objective
- Give teams time to prepare, providing resources and direction when available
- Place students into opposing teams focused on representing an opposing view point through either structured time opportunities or free debate
- Variation: Rebuttals must be answered by a different student than was originally rebutted



# Agree to Disagree

- Create four signs that say “Strongly Agree”, “Somewhat Agree”, “Somewhat Disagree”, and “Strongly Disagree”
- Post signs in corners of the class
- Give students a prompt and instruct them to move to the corner that best represents their opinion
- Once settled, instruct students to talk with their respective corner about why they’re there
- After, allow students from each corner to share whole class





# Role-Playing

- Assign members of the class the part or perspective of historical figures, authors, or other characters/objects
- Breakdown the role play into specific tasks to keep students organized
- Students research their parts in class or at home
- Students work together to act out a situation portraying their assigned character's perspective
- Observers critique and ask questions



# Picture Prompt

- Show students an image with no explanation, and ask them to identify/explain it, and justify their answers
- Variation: Ask students to free write using relevant terms, processes, or concepts
- Do not give the “answer” until they have explored all options first
- Note: This also works well as group activity



# Updating Notes

- Take a break for 2-3 minutes to allow students to compare their class notes so far with other students, fill in gaps, and develop joint questions
- Optionally walk around the classroom to answer questions and provide other resources or directions if necessary
- Allow time for students to debrief any joint questions or important gaps they've found at the end of this time



# Pass the Pointer

- Place a complex, intricate or detailed diagram or image on the screen
- Ask for volunteers to temporarily borrow the laser pointer to identify key features
- Also allow students to ask questions about items they don't understand
- Variation: Offer extra credit for students who volunteer



## Discussion Row

- Students take turns sitting in a front row
- Students that sit in this row can earn extra credit as individuals when they volunteer to answer questions posed in class
- This provides a group that will ALWAYS be prepared and interact with teacher questions
- Variation: Assign “experts” of the week who spend more time on the readings to serve as an extra source of information for students who have questions



# Beach Ball Bingo

- Write questions or prompts onto all surfaces of a beach ball (or tape them on)
- Have students throw the ball between each other in the classroom
- When a student catches the ball, they answer one of the questions where fingers are touching the ball
- Students continue passing the ball until all questions are answered
- Good as an icebreaker or review!



## 3-2-1

- After a lecture, distribute a 3-2-1 chart or instruct students to create their own answering the following prompts:
  - What are 3 things you learned in the lecture?
  - What are 2 things you found particularly interesting from the lecture?
  - What is 1 question you still have about the lecture content?
- Collect handouts at the end to revise following lectures



# The Tournament

- Divide the class into at least two groups and announce a competition for most points on a practice test
- Let them study a topic together and then give that quiz, tallying points
- After each round, let them study the next topic before quizzing again
- Points should be carried over from round to round





## Real World

- Have students discuss in class how a topic or concept relates to a real-world application or product
- Then ask them to record their answer on index cards or ask them to talk with their partners before sharing out in groups
- Variation: Have students find a photo of the real world application and share on a presentation with a short explanation (one slide per student or pairs of students)



# Bumper Stickers

- Ask students to write a slogan-like bumper sticker to illustrate a concept from lecture
- Allow time for students to draw their bumper stickers and share with the class
- Variation: can be used to ask them to sum up the entire course in one sentence
- Variation: Ask students to instead write a tabloid-style headline that would illustrate the concept currently being discussed



# Wisdom of Another

- After any individual brainstorm or creative activity, partner students up to share their results
- Then, call on volunteers to share with the class about something interesting or exemplar that they heard from their partner(s)
- Students are sometimes more willing to share in plenary the work of fellow students than their own work!



# Snowball Fight

- Have students write one sentence or question in response to a relevant prompt from the unit on a piece of paper
- Have students then ball up their paper and when everyone is ready, throw their "snowballs" across the classroom
- Once everyone has thrown their snowball, have them pick up someone else's snowball and read it aloud. Allow class discussion to arise out of the statements written on snowballs

# Resources

These activities were adapted from:

- **Language Tree Online**
  - <https://tinyurl.com/33rdrh89>
- **Iowa State University's 226 Active Learning Techniques**
  - <https://tinyurl.com/58wdcjmm>
- **California State Polytechnic University's CAFE Learning Cards**
  - <https://tinyurl.com/4rsm7jb2>
- **Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom, Bonwell & Eison, 1991 p.19**
  - <https://tinyurl.com/n2pjj7my>

Visit [colorado.edu/asset](https://colorado.edu/asset) for a digital version of these cards and more active learning resources