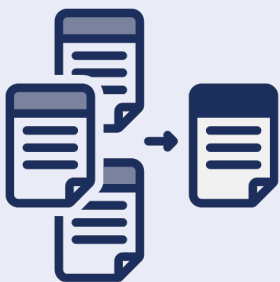


What are Active Learning Mindset Strategies?

Active learning strategies are instructional practices that go beyond traditional lecture-based teaching by engaging students in reflection, discussion, and the application of concepts, rather than simply listening to an instructor or reading passively. For example, this practice overview introduces several active learning approaches you can incorporate into your teaching to strengthen students' growth mindset, purpose and relevance, and sense of belonging.

Why use an Active Learning Mindset Strategy?

Active learning strategies offer several compelling benefits. First, they can be implemented through classroom activities that take only a few minutes. Second, they are flexible and can be used in any class setting, whether large or small, in-person or online. Third, they foster more engaging and motivating learning experiences that support deeper learning and academic success.



Practice Overview

This document provides a brief overview of several key resources related to Active Learning Mindset Strategies. In addition, you can find some clickable links to examples used in classes.

Resources for Further Reading

Barkley, E. F., & Major, C. H. (2020). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Freeman, S., Eddy, S. L., McDonough, M., Smith, M. K., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H., & Wenderoth, M. P. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(23), 8410–8415. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1319030111>

View the TBR Mindset Resource Repository

More Resources



**Growth
Mindset**

The belief that abilities can be developed through hard work, the use of effective strategies, and help from others when needed.

1. Current Confidence and Prior Experience Survey

At the start of a course or new unit, have students reflect on their current confidence and prior experience in the skills that they are about to learn. [Here are two examples of prior experience surveys](#) used in our courses. At the end of the course (or unit), have students respond again to reflect on how their confidence and experience with those skills improved. As a variation on this activity, you also can have students reflect on what's helped (or not helped) them learn similar skills in the past.

2. "How are you studying?" Logs

Ask students to keep a brief log on how they approach studying for your class (or approach completing a particular assignment) and how much time they actually spend. Then, share with students the results, especially highlighting connections on how success in the course is linked to better studying approaches and greater time investments.

3. Advice Letter from Former Students

Share advice from former students on how to succeed in your class during the first week. You could create an advice letter based on previous end-of-semester evaluation comments from students in your course. Or even better, as part of a new, end-of-semester activity, you could ask your current students to write a letter of advice to your future students on how to succeed in your class. Then, start future classes off with these advice letters.

4. One-Minute or Two-Minute Papers

Ask students to take one or two minutes to write their response to a question to check students' understanding of a particular topic. **Muddiest Point** asks students to reflect on what they still may be confused about; **Clearest Point** asks students to reflect on what they now feel more confident and skilled in. To get the most out of this exercise, be sure to discuss and/or address students' responses (either privately with a particular student or with the whole class).

5. Time Traveler

At the start of the semester, ask students to respond to questions similar to those they will encounter on the final exam or major assignments. Near the end of the semester, have them revisit their initial responses to reflect on how their understanding has deepened and to recognize their growth. This could be in writing or by creating a video of themselves.

6. Think-Pair-Share

Rather than posing a question to the entire class and only calling on one or more students to respond, this activity allows you to actively engage all of your students. First, pose a question to your entire class and ask all of your students to individually think and write down their initial response. Second, ask students to pair up to share their responses with at least one other student for initial feedback. Third, return to a class-wide discussion and ask students to share their individual responses (or revised responses based on interacting with other students).

Purpose & Relevance

The belief that one's schoolwork is valuable because it is connected to a larger purpose and/or relevant to one's life.

1. Student Interest Survey

At the start of the course, collect a survey to assess students' **(a)** interest and prior knowledge in your course topic, **(b)** interest in pursuing particular majors/minors, **(c)** interest in future careers, and/or **(d)** general interests and hobbies in life. Then, consider how you can adjust your teaching to connect to their interests. For example, when you have options on how to teach a particular concept, consider using examples that showcase how course content connects directly to the current or future interests that your students list. Also, consider strategically picking examples to help your students who initially report having lower value in your course to see connections to things they care about, or to support students who struggle to perform well early in your course.

2. Make It Personal

During activities or assignments, ask students to reflect on personal stories of how that topic has personally impacted them or someone they know and care about. Don't just ask them to think about or apply material abstractly.

3. Experiential Learning

Another way to help students see how ideas/concepts from our classes occur in the real world is to engage in experiential learning by visiting a local organization (e.g., business, school, or government agency). You can easily re-create experiential learning virtually by having students visit an organization's online website. In fact, online experiential learning can offer greater opportunities because you are no longer limited to just visiting organizations in your local community. An alternative approach is called **Find an Organization**, where you ask students to search online for an organization that uses particular ideas/concepts from class and submit a reflection on why.

4. Current Events

One way to help students see how ideas/concepts from our classes occur in the real world is to make connections to current events. For example, many disciplines will be able to make unique connections to major world and political events.

5. What, So What, Now What

After an activity or particular unit in class, have students reflect on **(a) "What"** to capture objectively what key skills/knowledge were learned in that activity/unit, **(b) "So What"** to capture subjectively what learning about those things meant to them, and **(c) "Now What"** to capture how learning what they did could impact and benefit them in the future.

Sense of Belonging

The belief that one is academically and socially connected, supported, and respected.

1. 1st Day Student Survey

On the first day of the course, ask students key questions to learn more about them. Surveying your students was also suggested as a Growth Mindset and Purpose and Relevance activity, but additional questions can be added to appreciate student issues around belonging (e.g., What concerns or questions do you currently have about the course?). [This is an example of a 1st day student survey](#) used in one of our courses. Once collected, reach out to students individually (or create an overall summary addressing the major concerns/questions raised).

2. Polling

Another technique growing in popularity, especially when teaching larger classes, is taking advantage of polling apps and software. You can strategically begin your class, have breaks during your class, or end your class on poll questions to allow all students' voices to be heard and shared. If teaching asynchronously online, you could embed poll questions/surveys in your instructional materials and follow up with posts of student responses.

3. Smaller Group Discussions

Break students up into smaller group discussions. This can be done in person, virtually using break-out rooms, or asynchronously by creating smaller discussion groups/teams on your learning management system. Consider these [additional tips to scaffold better student discussions](#).

4. Identity Share-Out

Provide students opportunities to share one or two things that are important to their identity and who they are. Consider making connections with what they share as they move through your course.

5. Community-Building

Facilitate ways for students to interact. This could be through tools on your Learning Management System or other virtual tools such as creating a Group Me text for your class.

6. Wisdom of Another

After students initially engage in an individual brainstorming or reflection activity, place students in pairs or small groups to share ideas with each other. Then ask for volunteers to share ideas from their partners that they found particularly interesting or insightful (aka, the wisdom of another).

7. Use Student Names

Although more challenging when teaching larger classes, take advantage of opportunities to personalize your communication and interactions by using students' names. Another approach is to learn student names and help students learn each other's names as well. If you choose to create Smaller Group Discussions, consider having students in those smaller groups get to know each other. Then reinforce using students' names early and often.