

Teaching and Learning Activities

Teaching and learning activities include everything an instructor does to facilitate student learning, from content transmission to active learning strategies. Active learning invites students into the learning process by requiring them to engage in meaningful hands-on learning activities. Active learning is often contrasted to the traditional lecture where students passively receive information from the instructor (Bonwell and Eison, 1991). To be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Active Learning for Online Community and Student Engagement

Active learning strategies are important for creating and sustaining an online community and enhancing student engagement. When teaching remotely, spending a bit more time on deliberately building community helps students connect with peers, with instructors, and with course content. In addition, research shows that motivation is a key factor in helping students to get the most out of online learning, and a strong sense of engagement with a course community can help learners tap into both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators (Lehman & Conceição, 2013).

Adapting In-Class Activities to the Online Environment

We often rely on our time face to face with students in the classroom to engage in a variety of activities designed to help students learn our intended course content. These activities typically fall into one of three categories representing different yet interrelated means of sharing information and exploring ideas (Su & Endersby, 2018):

Absorb-Type Activities

Absorb-type activities underscore the importance of carefully considering both what information you want to share with your students and how it will be delivered. Rather than the simple transmission of information, absorb-type activities help to structure material, assisting students in accessing key information and beginning to actively process and consolidate course content.

Do-Type Activities

Do-type activities are typically experiential, offering students the opportunity to try out and practice the skills you are hoping they will develop. This is also an important time to integrate formative assessment strategies into your teaching, where students can obtain important and timely feedback on their progress in the course.

Connect-Type Activities

Connect-type activities encourage students to develop higher order skills in critical thinking, including practice in analysis and synthesis. Students may also begin to make critical connections between theories and other course content through reflective activities, integrating a variety of information and ideas into new perspectives, skills, and understandings. This work may be less visible and more individual than most other in class activities, but will still rely on clear instructions and meaningful prompts to support deeper learning and skill development.

Adapting Absorb, Do, and Connect-Type Activities for Remote Learning

Absorb, do, and connect-type activities can be adapted to remote learning in a variety of ways. The table below outlines some of the most common teaching and learning activities alongside suggestions for adapting these activities in the online environment.

Table 1: Face-to-Face Learning Strategies with Remote Equivalents

Face-to-Face Learning	Remote Learning
Absorb-Type Activities: Presenting and Sharing Information	
In-Class Lectures	Recording lectures via Zoom or narrated PowerPoint Lectures can be delivered live using Zoom or similar online conferencing/meeting tool (students can engage and ask questions by speaking and/or using a text-based chat)
Guest Speakers	Asynchronous: Asking guest speakers to record lectures using Zoom or narrated PowerPoint (students can ask questions or respond to discussion prompts in a discussion forum) Synchronous: Guest lectures can be streamed using Zoom or similar video conferencing platforms, (students can interact live using audio and/or text-based chats)
In Class Demonstrations/Observation	Virtual simulations (students can interact with and complete online) Watch a video (e.g., on YouTube) and respond, critique, or evaluate in a written

	assignment or a group discussion
Assigned Readings	Assigned readings can still be made available to students in the learning management system _____
Office Hours	Consider allowing individuals and small groups to sign up for online 'office hours' Create a course FAQ to post on coursepage
Do-Type Activities: Active Learning & Engagement	
In Class Participation, Discussions, and Group Work (Small and Large Groups)	Use Zoom for synchronous discussions (breakout rooms can be created for multiple, smaller groups to engage in discussion concurrently) Discussion forums and/or collaborative wikis can be used for asynchronous discussions (facilitated by the instructor and/or peers)
Group Discussions	Create reading groups in which members keep each other accountable and work together to summarize or analyse weekly readings or other multimedia documents Discussion forums: Spend time facilitating conversations in discussion forums on an ongoing basis to show students that their contributions are being heard, for nudging discussion to the next level, and to encourage students to respond to one another's points
Hands-On Activities (e.g. labs, studio-work)	Virtual simulations (e.g. videos) can be

	<p>viewed online for students to discuss and critique</p> <p>Students can share their own work digitally (e.g. photographs, videos) for feedback and discussion</p>
Role Play, Case Studies, Simulations	<p>Scenarios and other supporting information can be shared in writing, or through the use of other digital resources (videos, articles, etc) available online</p> <p>Students can prepare written or verbal (audio) response(s) for submission</p> <p>Students may also work in small groups (Wiki, Google doc) to prepare responses collaboratively in writing and/or in live or recorded presentations</p>
Connect-Type Activities: Reflection, Analysis, and Synthesis	
Written Reflections (e.g one minute paper)	<p>Written reflections can be submitted on a discussion forum, as a Word file (by email or through learning management system), or collected as a group in a Wiki</p>
Learning Journals/Logs	<p>Students can track and complete journals or logs using individual Wikis or separate Word documents that can be uploaded, shared, or emailed when completed</p>

Ideally, students should spend 40% of their time receiving information or ‘absorbing’, 50% of their time practicing or ‘doing’, and the remaining 10% of their time reflecting or connecting (Horton, 2012).

It is important to remember, particularly in an environment that may be new to many of your students, to continue to set clear expectations (e.g. attendance, communication, behaviour) and provide explicit instructions for how students can engage in these activities. These expectations may need to be communicated more than once using more than one medium (e.g. written and verbal) in order to help students navigate a novel or challenging way of learning.

References

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