

What's in Your Teaching Toolbox? Learning Activities for Any Course

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A teaching toolbox provides you with a limited array of activities you can use in class to engage students and teach content. Having a course-specific teaching toolbox provides several advantages.

- By repeatedly using a learning activity throughout a course, students improve their ability to complete and learn from that activity. For example, repeatedly participating in notetaking pairs helps students become better notetakers.
- Having a limited array of learning activities for a specific course helps you prepare for class fast and avoid non-interactive lectures.

Tips for Compiling a Teaching Toolbox for a Specific Course

- When selecting learning activities for your teaching toolbox, think about the learning objectives associated with your course and the skills students need to build to master your course content.
- Put a limited number of learning activities in your teaching toolbox. We recommend three to five. Ten learning activities are provided below to provide you with an array of activities to choose from, not because we think you should use 10 strategies in the same class. For each of these ten learning activities, we included two case-sensitive links to online resources to provide you with more detailed information about the activity.

Tools for Enhancing Discussions

Circle of Voices

“Students (in groups of four or five) take turns speaking for 1-3 minutes on an assigned topic. While each student speaks, no interruptions, questions or comments are allowed. After each group member has spoken, open the floor for general discussion but do not allow any new ideas to be introduced. The purpose of this technique is to encourage active listening and to focus the discussion” (Quoted from <http://bit.ly/CircleVoices1>).

- <http://bit.ly/CircleVoices2> Excerpt from *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*
- <http://bit.ly/CircleVoices3> U Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence

Fishbowl Discussion

“In a Fishbowl discussion, students seated inside the “fishbowl” actively participate in a discussion by asking questions and sharing their opinions, while students standing outside listen carefully to the ideas presented. Students take turns in these roles, so that they practice being both contributors and listeners in a group discussion” (Quoted from http://bit.ly/Fishbowl_1). Fishbowl discussions can also be used to teach communication skills. Each student in the outer circle can be paired with a student in the inner circle and, after the discussion, provide that student with feedback on their discussion participation.

- http://bit.ly/Fishbowl_2 Peter Pappas discussion guide
- http://bit.ly/Fishbowl_3 Edutopia Video

Tools for Enhancing Lectures

Notetaking Pairs

Students pair up and compare their notes one section at a time. For each section, one person summarizes and identifies questions they have and the other person fills in the gaps and answers the questions. Members of the pair then switch roles.

- http://bit.ly/NotePairs_1 U Toronto Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation
- http://bit.ly/NotePairs_2 Excerpt from *Collaborative Learning Techniques*

Minute Paper

Minute papers are meant to provide the instructor with feedback on students' learning. Give students one minute to answer a question such as "what was the most important thing you learned today," "list the key concepts," or "what examples today helped you the most?" Students can submit their responses for the instructor to read after class. Alternatively, students can compare responses in small groups and collaborate to write a better response.

- http://bit.ly/MinutePaper_1 Excerpt from Angelo & Cross
- http://bit.ly/MinutePaper_2 8 Questions to Ask

Lecture Wrappers

"Prior to beginning the day's lecture, the instructor gives students some tips on active listening. In particular, students are encouraged to think about the key points of the lecture as they listen and take notes. At the end of the lecture, students write what they think the three most important ideas of the lecture were on an index card. After they hand those in, the instructor reveals the three most important ideas from the lecture. This immediate feedback allows students to monitor their active listening strategies. After three successive lecture wrappers (with successively less faculty support, from a mini-lecture on active listening to no advance warning), student responses increasingly matched the instructor's: 45% the first time, 68% the second time, and 75% the third (Lovett, 2008)" (Quoted from http://bit.ly/LectureWrapper_1)

- http://bit.ly/LectureWrapper_2 Video and Handout from K. Patricia Cross Academy
- http://bit.ly/LectureWrapper_3 U Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence Blog

3-2-1

In a 3-2-1 activity, you ask students to list three of something, two of something else, and one final thing. For example, you might ask students to list three important things they learned, two things they found interesting, and one question they still have over the material.

- <http://bit.ly/3-2-1A> Video and Handout from K. Patricia Cross Academy
- <http://bit.ly/3-2-1B> UNT Health Science Center's Center for Innovative Learning

Other Learning Activities

Gallery Walk

In a Gallery Walk, students rotate through three to five stations. Sometimes each station poses a question. Students read the question and any existing responses and then add their own

responses. Sometimes each station presents student work or instructor-provided materials. Students post responses on sticky notes: they can respond to the presented information or to other posted responses.

- http://bit.ly/GWalk_1 Science Education Research Center at Carleton College
- http://bit.ly/GWalk_2 Chapter by Gina Schlesselman-Tarango

Games: Taboo, Pictionary, Heads Up

A number of party games can be easily adapted to an educational setting: just replace the common-place concepts players try to guess (e.g., bowling pin) with concepts linked to your course content. When playing Pictionary, students use drawings to try to get other students to guess a particular concept. In Heads Up, students give clues to help another student guess a particular concept. Taboo is similar to Heads Up, except that students are given a list of terms they cannot say as they give clues. To prepare for students to play any of these games, all you need to do is write each concept on a 3x5 card.

The videos below will help you understand how each game is played.

- Pictionary: <https://youtu.be/hH0jmquSAds>
- Heads Up: https://youtu.be/PO_ezpX7DwY
- Taboo: <https://youtu.be/4QeA4nrcQV0>

Concept Maps

Concept maps provide a visual summary of a topic that shows how concepts are related to each other. A concept map consists of circles labeled with concepts and lines linking those concepts. The lines should also be labeled with a word or phrase that clarifies the relationship between the concepts. You can have students complete a concept map that you have begun for them or have them create one from scratch.

We recommend that you first create a concept map with the class, as creating good concepts maps is a skill students will need to learn. If you have students bring laptops to class, they can collaborate online to create a concept map using Cmap for free (<https://cmap.ihmc.us/>).

- http://bit.ly/ConMap_1 Science Education Research Center at Carleton College
- http://bit.ly/ConMap_2 U Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence

Jigsaw

“Jigsaw was first developed to combat racial bias among elementary school students. In the early 1970s, social psychologist Elliot Aronson developed this method after being asked to help diffuse tension in classrooms where black, Hispanic, and white students had recently been integrated. Aronson and his team observed that the students were learning in a competitive environment. With his research team, he recommended creating a cooperative environment where students had to depend on each other to learn assigned material well. In just a few weeks, students initially hostile to one another were, instead, encouraging each other to succeed and learn the material well. Racial tensions were largely diffused, and students learned the assigned material with a higher level of mastery...

“Research has shown this method is useful for learners of all ages. The primary strategy is to create assignments and activities that allow students to cultivate topic-specific expertise and then teach the material they have learned to other students in the class. Student groups are then asked to draw on everyone’s expertise to complete a task together or prepare for an individual exam” (Quoted from <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2018/08/29/jigsaw/>).

- http://bit.ly/KPC_Jigsaw Video and Handout from K. Patricia Cross Academy
- <https://www.jigsaw.org/> Elliot Aronson’s site

Book with Collections of Activities

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. F. (2009). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. John Wiley & Sons.

Barkley, E. F., & Major, C. H. (2015). *Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. John Wiley & Sons.

Brookfield, S. D., & Preskill, S. (2016). *The discussion book: 50 great ways to get people talking*. John Wiley & Sons.

Lang, J. M. (2016). *Small teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Major, C. H., Harris, M. S., & Zakrajsek, T. (2016). *Teaching for learning: 101 intentionally designed educational activities to put students on the path to success*. New York: Routledge.