Northwest (HHS Region 10)

PTTC Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
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Using Interactive Activities in Training

Purpose

Thirty years ago, learning theory suggested a maximum of 20 minutes for lecture format before moving students to an activity. It is widely acknowledged that information technology and social media have created or reinforced fast-paced action, and most students now have very short attention spans, particularly auditory attention (for lecture, for instance). Current thoughts about student learning recommend changing up the format of information delivery and/or activity every 3 minutes!

Interactive activities engage students in their own learning and shift the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student. They enable you, the instructor, to:

- Set the expectation of interaction and individual responsibility for learning
- Mix up learning methods and styles to meet more students' needs
- Assess students' level of knowledge of a topic before you present your material, so you can tailor your presentations as needed to keep students' interest
- Assign responsibility for learning and sharing information to students
- Assess students' mastery of information
- Individualize application of information to students' work

Beginning a class with introductions, ground rules/guidelines, and a parking lot is a good way to set the expectation of interaction for students (see Interactive Opening Activities Ideas_ppt folder for sample slides).

Group and Individual Learning Activities

Interactive activity can be as simple as asking students to reflect on a question and share their thoughts aloud or with a fellow student, and is a very effective method of connecting students to content. Asking how the content compares or contrasts to what they have previously learned or experienced anchors content to students' lives, the first condition for adult learning.

Learning objectives can help identify when formal interactive learning activities will support student learning. Objectives that ask students to master and apply, compare new information with previous knowledge, show evidence of understanding, explain, describe, analyze, demonstrate, or use other such action verbs lend themselves to interactive learning activities.
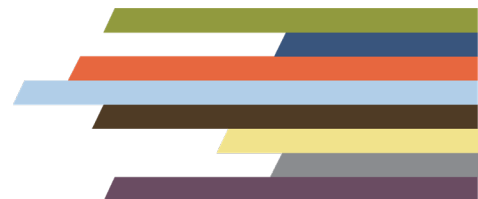
Interactive learning activities can combine individual and small group work. Individually, students are asked to reflect on some aspect of the learning content and then to compare their own ideas or perspectives with others in small groups, and discuss and share small group responses with other groups. Or groups of students are asked to complete a learning task together, then share their results with the larger group. The instructor summarizes student feedback, corrects any misinformation, adds anything that was missed, and connects the activity to the learning objectives.

Forming Small Groups

Have students get themselves into groups of 3 or 4, or however large you want your groups – you want to create same-size groups so interactive activities take about the same amount of time for each group to complete, no group is waiting too long for others to complete, and you can stay on schedule easier.

Change up small groups 2 or 3 times in a day's training, especially if students know each other and are socializing in their small groups rather than completing their task. Ways to change up small groups include:

- Counting off
- Playing cards
- Birthday line
- Mixing by student characteristics, e.g., experience levels, work settings, etc.

Facilitating Small Groups

Always explain the purpose of any activity, e.g., "The purpose of this activity is to share what you already know about (topic) as a baseline for our next presentation on (topic)."

Have students move into their groups before giving the activity instructions. Tell (and show) them everything they need to take with them into their small group to successfully complete the activity (e.g., worksheets; handouts; markers; etc.)

The key to successful small group learning is giving clear instructions for activities. This is harder than it seems. See the handout, Giving Clear Instructions, for lots of great tips.

Provide instructions visually (ppt or easel paper), verbally, and by showcase, if necessary. Ask students to raise their hands if they're clear about what they need to do; this is your check to be sure they understand your instructions and can complete the activity. Make sure everyone is clear.

Always tell students how much time they have to complete the activity, and what/how you want them to report out, including time for reporting (e.g., "You have 10 minutes to complete this activity. Identify a reporter to share a 1-minute summary of your discussion with the class.") Give a two-minute "warning" before the end of the allotted time for the group activity. Then have groups report out, reminding them of any parameters you set (e.g., summarize the discussion, time limit, etc.).

Types of Interactive Learning Activities

1. **<u>Group Study and Report-Out</u>** – This type of small group activity makes students responsible for learning core content and for learning from their fellow students. It relieves the lecture format and is extremely engaging for students. It does involve the instructor preparing and providing handouts with content for groups to use in the activity.

   The instructor will:
   - Assign small pieces of content to each group
   - Provide written content information (e.g., handouts, online resources, brochures, etc.) or audio/audiovisual resources for each group to read or review
   - Provide written discussion guidelines or guiding questions for groups as they learn the material together. For example, "You have 10 minutes. Individually, read the material assigned to your group; then, together in your group, answer the following questions about the material: _____ /or discuss _____."
   - Provide instructions for preparing their report-out to the other groups. For example, "Prepare a 2-minute summary of the material assigned to your group, including the questions you answered/your discussion."
   - Summarize main points, correct any misinformation, add any missing information as needed after group reports

2. **<u>Kinesthetic Response</u>** – This type of activity is intended to check students' mastery of content presented and to get students on their feet. It is highly engaging and is especially useful after lunch or when students' energy is lagging. The instructor asks quizzing questions, posts signs around the room with the possible answers, and students move to the sign that they believe best answers the question.

   For example, you might post the names of 3 different classifications of drugs around the room, then ask a series of questions about drug actions, and have students move to the sign which represents the correct drug classification corresponding to each drug action.

   Alternately, you can have students line up along a continuum in response to a question or statement, e.g., "Alcohol is much more damaging to teens than marijuana" (the continuum would stretch from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree.")

   Another type of activity combines kinesthetic response with matching. The instructor distributes 3X5 cards, prepared with pieces of content, to the class and has students find their "partner," matching the information on their cards to like information or categories on other students' cards.

3. **<u>Opinion vs. Fact</u>** – This activity helps students connect to the course material through their own ideas and experience.

Students are asked, in small groups, to brainstorm a list or answer a question or formulate their opinion in response to a question, and then compare their responses to the "correct" response/answer, according to the course material. They can write their ideas on sticky notes (one idea per note), then share their responses by posting them on easel paper. Small groups can then review each page, grouping similar responses and identifying themes. Groups then either report out or rotate between the pages, reading the themes and responses for themselves. They then compare these responses to the "correct" answers provided by the instructor, preferably in written as well as verbal form. The instructor then summarizes the work, comparing and contrasting student responses with the "correct" answers.

4. **Matching Games** – Matching characteristics to categories in small groups helps students share knowledge and master content. It also encourages students to help each other reach a level of mastery, and allows instructors to check for accurate content mastery. For example, matching a list of acute drug affects with the correct drug.

5. **Reflective Questions** – This is a simple, often very quick, yet highly engaging way to involve students in making connections between new information and prior knowledge/experience, to reinforce learnings, and to form intentions to use new information in their work.

   For example, instructors can ask questions, such as, "What did you learn that was new?" "What did you relearn or learn in a different way?" "What new questions do you have?" "What old questions do you still have?" Students can be asked questions to consider individually, then to share their ideas with one or more fellow students in diads, triads or small groups. They can share out highlights of their discussion with the class.

6. **Think-Pair-Share** – This strategy is less extroverted and honors more introverted students. The instructor asks a question and gives the students 30-60 seconds of quiet time to reflect on the answer. Students then find a partner (someone they don't know, if you need to mix them up and get them moving) and share their responses with each other. Allowing pairs not to report out again honors more introverted students and protects privacy, so instructors are able to ask slightly deeper questions using this strategy. Tell students that they will only be sharing their thoughts with one other person in the class. It is best to use this process for deeper questions once students have gotten to know each other a bit, rather than early in the class.

7. **Brainstorming** – Brainstorming ideas, responses, questions, facts, etc. in small groups serves to expand students' ideas, viewpoints and perspectives so that they are more open to new information. Having participants report out the 2-3 most interesting, provocative, or commonly agreed items on their brainstorm list (and none that have already been noted by other groups) is one way to limit reporting time without limiting ideas.

8. **<u>Application Activities</u>** – Application activities are special types of interactive learning activities. They are designed to create student intention to use specific information/skills they learn in the real-world, usually their work environment. This correlates with transfer of information/skills used in the classroom into the work environment. This is particularly important as a final activity at the end of the class.

   For example, ask students to write down, for themselves, specific content from the course that they feel is particularly useful to them at this time in their work, and then to write a specific time in the next week that they will use it. For example, "At next Tuesday's staff meeting, I'll share what I learned about the percentage of users at risk for addiction to various substances."

   You could also consider using an application activity at the end of each presentation to encourage students to apply what they've learned to their work.