

Roberta S. Matthews Center for Teaching and Learning
English Composition Workshop Series: Improving Student Engagement
September 22, 2022

This workshop considered ways to improve student engagement. We discussed challenges and brainstormed solutions.

Challenges Identified

- Limited number of students who offer to speak
- Lack of preparation by students
- General lack of response and energy

How can we encourage students to engage in these circumstances?

The CTL's website offers many [resources on activities you can try in class](#). Participants in today's workshop shared some approaches they've tried. Some effective and easy exercises are:

- Think, pair, share: Ask a question for your students to think about on their own. Then, after a few minutes, pair them with a peer to discuss further. Finish by having them share their exchange with the class.
- Sticky Note Clustering: Present your students with a question and hand out 3-4 sticky notes per student. Have them write one idea per note, then place their notes onto a wall. Have students move the notes around into categories, which develops skills of analysis and critical thinking.
- Targeted prompts: Present students with a very clear, specific prompt in response to the reading. Have them take a few minutes to jot down their thoughts, then ask them to read what they wrote to the class.
- Project portions of student work (anonymously) and ask your students to constructively criticize the writing of their peers that is on display.
- Give students index cards, ask them to write a few ideas about the reading at the beginning of class. At the end of class, have them reflect briefly and ask them to write questions or comments on their cards to discuss for the following class meeting.
- Move assigned work into the classroom where possible, in order to circumvent lack of preparation: bring copies of the reading, offer sample essays for peer review, have students read out loud, etc.

These exercises and their many permutations incorporate certain common elements:

- Peer interaction. Students feel more comfortable talking to each other and batting around ideas amongst themselves.
- Opportunity to write down your thoughts, work through ideas before presenting them to instructor. This is good for shy students)
- Physical movement. Moving around can help wake up students, get their energy up, get their brains working.
- Props. When you give someone a tangible object to work with, it can help focus their thinking about the task at hand.
- Clear articulation of tasks/expectations; breakdown of assignment into smaller tasks. Open ended questions can be intimidating and hard to tackle

What will you try? Let me know how it goes, and be in touch with any questions!

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