**Teaching and Learning with Engagement**

Centre for Teaching Excellence

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# Introduction

Many of the activities and ideas presented in this resource are appropriate for online, blended, and face-to-face courses. This resource includes ideas for the first day of class as well as strategies that assist in assessing students’ comprehension of course material.

# Getting to Know Your Students

Getting to know your students and having your students to get to know each other is an important aspect of building a community of learners. Some ideas that will assist you in this endeavor are listed below.

* **Interview and Introduce:** Have students interview and introduce each other.
* **Sharing a Surprising Fact**: Have each student share something that others in their group would be surprised to know about them.
* **Name Whip** – Each student selects an adjective to place in front of their first name that starts with the same sound and reveals something about themselves e.g. Mindful Mary, Assertive Adrian. Name whip also works well when students are being placed in groups and meeting their group members for the first time.
* [6-word memoir](https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/community/celebrity-six-word-memoirs/): It is the story of your life in six words – concise and introspective.
* **Questions with Similar Answers**: Make up a list of questions that requires students to individually find other students in the class who can answer the questions that relate to them; for example, who is the owner of a dog? Who has visited Paris? Who speaks three languages, etc.
* **Map of the World**: Add a map of the world to your PowerPoint slide and have students use the annotate feature to star where they are joining the class from. Alternatively, you can post the map to your eLearn site or a platform like Padlet and ask students to note places on the map that they have visited, want to visit, where they call home, etc.
* **Check In:** Do a check in with students by having them share one word/image to share how they are feeling. They may share their word or image in small groups or with the class. They can have share a word in chat or post an image to Padlet. You can also include a number of images on one slide and have students use the annotate feature to mark the image that expresses how they are feeling. Variations on the above could be images of different types of chairs and ask students to select one and use the annotate feature to place their name or initials under the chair they have chosen.
* **Short Survey:** You may choose to send out an email prior to the beginning of class and ask students to complete a short survey that they can access through your course eLearn site. Alternatively, you can distribute and collect it on the first day of class if you are teaching face to face. The information gleaned from the surveys will help you to get to know your students and is extremely useful in placing your students into groups. An example of a student survey follows:

## Student Survey Example

**Course Name and Number** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Your First Name/Last Name**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. What program are you in?
 |  |
| 1. What pronouns do you use?

May I use them in class? |  |
| 1. In what countries have you lived?
 |  |
| 1. In what countries have you studied?
 |  |
| 1. In what countries have you worked?
 |  |
| 1. What languages do you speak?
 |  |
| 1. What jobs have you had?
 |  |
| 1. What job(s) do you have now?
 |  |
| 1. What hobbies do you enjoy?
 |  |
| 1. What can I do to support your learning?
 |  |
| 1. What are some challenges you might be facing this term?
 |  |
| 1. What question do you have about (Cross Cultural Business/insert course name) that you are hoping this course will answer?
 |  |
| 1. Is there anything else you want to share with me?
 |  |

For additional questions that you might like to include, click on the link to Michelle Pacansky-Brock’s [Getting to Know You Survey](https://brocansky.com/humanizing/student-info) and for information on humanizing your course, refer to her guide [How and Why to Humanize Your Online Course.](https://brocansky.com/humanizing/infographic2)

Access these links for additional suggestions for [Getting to Know Your Students](https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/classroomclimate/strategies/individuals.html) and ideas for the [First Day of Class](https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/firstday.html) presented by *Carnegie Mellon University, Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence & Teaching Innovation*.

# Equitable Strategies for Creating Student Groups

Working in groups can help students develop effective collaboration and communication skills. Students self-selecting their own groups can often create non-diverse groups. The following activities describe strategies for creating student groups that allow for more diversity.

1. **Student Survey** (as noted in the previous section)
2. **Find an Uncommon Commonality:** When you place students into groups for the first time and you want them to learn more about each other, pose this instruction: “Find an uncommon commonality”. The beauty of this instruction is how much students learn about each other as they try to come up with an uncommon commonality. This uncommon commonality can then used as inspiration for a team name. An example of an uncommon commonality might be that all of the students in the group practice yoga or they have all visited France, or all speak three languages.
3. **Birthday – month and day - line up – no talking**: Students place themselves in a line based on the month and day of their birthday. Students with birthdays in January will begin the line and those with birthdays in December will be at the end of the line. They must do this without speaking and only using hand gestures. Once students have organized themselves by their birthdays, starting at the first of the line, ask each student to reveal the month and day of their birthday. This is a fun, engaging activity and gets students up out of their seats and moving. If you want students placed in groups of five, count off students from the beginning of the line and direct them to where they will be meeting as a group.
4. **Playing cards – Go Fish**: Each student receives a card and must find its match among the students. Students with the same card form a group.
5. **Puzzle Pieces**: Each student receives a puzzle piece and finds other students in the class with the same puzzle piece and they form a group.
6. **Online**: You can randomly break students into groups in Zoom.

# Introducing Your Syllabus

Your syllabus is an opportunity to set a positive first impression of the course and you as an instructor. For example, why take this course?What’s exciting about it? What gets you as an instructor excited?

* When introducing your syllabus, consider describing your approach to teaching, your commitment to learning (what students can expect from you and what you expect from them) and how to get support in this course.
* One way to introduce your syllabus is to give a brief overview of a description of the course, ask students to read the course outline and highlight any details that they would like to know more about. After they have had enough time to read the syllabus and note their questions, place the students in groups and ask them to review their questions together and look for similarities. The students then pose their questions to the instructor who is, of course, eager to answer them!
* [Ten things to consider about your course syllabus](https://academicmatters.ca/ten-things-about-your-course-syllabus/) from Academic Matters.

Options for Office Hours
Office hours are an opportunity to connect with students, build learning communities, and to answer questions students may have. Students are not always clear on the purpose of “office hours” so you might want to consider renaming office hours to something more meaningful such as ‘coaching hours’, ‘drop-in support’, or ‘student support hours’. Encourage students to come by for an informal chat.

# Course/Class Guidelines

Setting class guidelines for how you will work together is important in establishing students’ commitment to the learning process. This is also an opportunity to discuss equity, diversity, and inclusion and what the expectations in the learning environment are.

Consider posing these two questions and having students brainstorm answers to them to assist in determining classroom guidelines.

* What would it look like when I as your instructor commit 100 percent to teaching this course?
* What would it look like when you as a student commit 100 percent to this course?

Start with the first question listed and have students in groups decide on the answers. As each group offers their ideas, indicate what you can commit to. For example, students may ask that you return assessments within a reasonable time frame, indicate what you can commit to; for example, all exams will be returned within 10 days and all assessments within 7 days.

Students are often very eager to answer the first question and have fewer ideas for the second one. For the second question, students often commit to arriving on time, returning from breaks at the requested time, committing to do the assigned readings prior to class, and sharing the workload equally on group projects.

As student groups are offering their answers, be sure to document what you have committed to and what they have. Place these commitments on your course eLearn site so that you can refer to them throughout the term.

# Rubrics

Rubrics are important for students to understand how their work is assessed. Many rubrics exist online so you do not have to start from scratch designing a rubric. Rubrics need to be appropriately and carefully designed to assess the learning outcomes for the assessment.

* [Rubrics](https://teaching.berkeley.edu/resources/assessment-and-evaluation/design-assessment/rubrics) from UC Berkeley Center for Teaching & Learning
* [Rubistar](http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php) Online Rubrics Generator Tool for inspiration

# Gathering Student Feedback on Your Teaching (Formative Feedback)

It is important to get feedback from your students prior to a formal evaluation. The following link provides approaches to obtaining feedback from students.

* George Brown College: [Ten Tools to Try](https://oae.georgebrown.ca/office-of-academic-excellence/gathering-student-feedback/)
* [Classroom Assessment Techniques for Formative Feedback](https://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching/assessment-and-evaluation/classroom-assessment-techniques-quick-strategies-to-check-student-learning-in-class/)

After you have reviewed the formative feedback from your students, ensure that you review the feedback with the students and address what you can change and what you may not be able to change.

# Assessing Students’ Understanding of Assigned Readings/Course Content

## Readiness Assessments

Readiness Assessments work well in both face-to-face and online learning environments. Students take the assessment individually; for example, students complete 10 or more multiple-choice questions and submit their answers. Then students in small groups take the assessment together.

For the individual stage of the assessment, it can be accessed through the course eLearn site without the grades for the assessment being revealed to the students. For the small group stage of the assessment, during a synchronous session, students can be placed in groups and can access the assessment through the eLearn site or by uploading the assessment during the breakout groups.

One valuable activity to add to the group’s completion of the Readiness Assessment is to ask them to provide an explanation for the answers they have selected for the questions. This additional instruction reveals how well they truly understand the course content and can be a better indicator of comprehension than simply choosing an answer for a multiple choice question.

For face-to-face classes, try the immediate feedback assessment technique (scratch cards) for the team assessment. The Centre for Teaching Excellence has an inventory of cards that you may request for this activity. [More info here](http://www.if-at.com).

## Two-Stage Exams

Two-stage exams can be easy to implement, follow a similar approach described above for Readiness Assessments, and have worked well in many courses. Two-stage exams offer an opportunity for students (on the second stage of the exam) to collectively share and assess their understanding of course concepts. When students complete the second stage of the exam with a small group of peers, they typically develop a clear sense of the questions they answered correctly and learn from each other what alternative solutions they should have considered, which creates a valuable collaborative learning experience.

Stage 1: Students take the exam individually.

Stage 2: After students turn in their individual exams, small groups of up to four students solve similar or identical problems during the remainder of the examination time. The individual exam is typically weighted 80 – 90 percent with 10 – 20 percent of the grade for the group exam.

More information on Two-Stage Exams:

[Information on Two-Stage Exams](https://blogs.ubc.ca/eoassei/two-stage-exams/)

[Two-Stage Exams - UBC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b07Oue306wE)

## Six-word Story

Ask students to reflect and synthesize as they identify the essence or core idea of a video, text, situation, experience, etc. Synthesizing is a highly valued and critical skill to acquire. It takes time to discern the essence of a video, text, or image and to document it in six words.

[Examples of Six-word Stories](http://www.sixwordstories.net)

## Black-out Poetry

**Part 1:**

1. Assign a reading to your students.
2. Have the students individually circle key words/ideas from the reading.

**Part 2:**

1. Place students into groups of three. Give them only one page of the reading and have them compare their selection of words/ideas. The group then finalizes their choice of words/ideas.
2. Ask students to black/strike out the remainder of the text.
3. From the words/ideas create a visual poem.

**Benefits:**

* Works as a summary of important ideas.
* Serves as an opportunity for students to make connections more deeply to the reading.
* Examples: [Black-out Poetry](https://www.pinterest.ca/oldslibrary/blackout-poetry-examples/)

## Reflection

Ask students to each select a short passage (paragraph) from the chapter/text/reading and reflect on why they chose it, how it relates to them, why it is significant, and to share examples from their personal experience that demonstrate the meaningfulness of the passage they each selected. Be sure to create a rubric to assess the reflection.

## 3-2-1 Bridge

**Reveals the development of thinking over time:**

* 3 thoughts
* 2 questions
* 1 analogy

Student share initial ideas, questions, thoughts then make connections with their new thinking after further learning has taken place. Click here for more information on [3-2-1 Bridget Example](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/3-2-1%20Bridge_1.pdf)

## I used to think …. Now I think …

This technique is another strategy that works well to make visible how students’ thinking has changed from the beginning of a lesson or unit or course to its end. [I used to think ... Now I think](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/resources/i-used-to-think-now-i-think)

## Concept Maps

Concept maps provide improved opportunities for retention and transfer of knowledge. It is important to choose a clear focus question when assigning a concept map.

For some ideas and concept mapping tools from University of Waterloo, click this link: [Concept Mapping Tools](https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/teaching-tips-educational-technologies/all/concept-mapping-tools)

# Making Thinking Visible:

The following three activities are taken from the text, *Making Thinking Visible,* which contains a number of great teaching and learning ideas: [Thinking Routines](http://www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines)

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## CSI Thinking Routine

This routine asks students to identify and distill the essence of the ideas - taken from readings, viewing, or listening - in nonverbal ways by using a colour, symbol, and image to represent the big ideas they have identified. Students are pushed to think metaphorically.

1. Think of the big ideas and important themes in the reading/video/play/recording, image/etc.
2. Choose a colour that you think best represents the essence of that idea.
3. Create a symbol that you think best represents the essence of that idea.
4. Sketch an image that you think best captures the essence of that idea.

When you finish, in triads, share your thinking – explain your choice of colour, symbol, and image.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Colour** | **Symbol** | **Image** |

## Sentence – Phrase - Word

This thinking routine captures the essence of the text or “what speaks to you” and is a catalyst for rich discussion.

Individually

1. Select the *sentence* from the reading that was meaningful to you- the sentence that you feel captures a core idea of the text.
2. Select a *phrase* from the reading that moved, engaged, or provoked you.
3. Select a *word* from the reading that captured your attention or struck you as powerful.

In Triads

1. Discuss and record. As a group begin by first sharing your words, then phrases, then sentences. Discuss your choices and explain why you selected the ones you did.
2. Looking at your group’s collective choices of words, phrases and sentences, reflect on the conversation by identifying:
* What themes emerged?
* What implications or predictions can be drawn?
* Were there aspects of the text not captured in your choices?

## Tug-of-War

Place a line across the middle of your desk or table to represent a tug-of-war rope.

Working with a dilemma that can be considered from multiple perspectives or stances:

* Identify and frame the two opposing sides of the dilemma you are exploring. Use these to label each end of your tug-of-war rope.
* Generate as many “tugs,” or reasons that “pull you forward,” that is, support each side of the dilemma as you can. Write these on individual sticky notes.
* Determine the strength of each tug and place it on your tug-of-war rope, placing the strongest tugs at the farthest ends of the rope and the weaker tugs more toward the center.
* Capture any “What if . . .?” questions that arise in the process. Write these on sticky notes and place them above the tug-of-war rope.

# Liberating Structures

Liberating Structures provide a wide range of group facilitation ideas that work well in classes, meetings, brainstorming sessions, etc. Check out the multitude of group facilitation ideas here: [liberating structures](http://www.liberatingstructures.com/ls/)

## Teaching Challenges (A Liberating Structure)

In Triads: Share a teaching/learning challenge and seek advice from two peers – use the following [liberating structure](http://www.liberatingstructures.com/ls/): Troika Consulting:

1. Choose a challenge/dilemma you need help figuring out solutions to? 1 min.
2. First peer shares their question. 1-2 min.
3. Two peer consultants ask clarifying questions. 1-2 min.
4. First peer turns around with their back facing the peer consultants.
5. Together, the peer consultants generate ideas, suggestions, coaching advice. 4-5 min.
6. First peer turns around and shares what was most valuable about the experience. 1-2 min.
7. Groups switch to next person and repeat steps.

This liberating structure can be used with students to receive feedback from their peers on draft proposals ideas, projects, etc.