

Active Learning Strategies

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Anticipatory Set

Purpose

The brain needs to be engaged before learning can occur. The anticipatory set or “hook” activated background knowledge of the learner that relates to the objectives of the lesson, and it helps to produce an organized pattern of thought. It can also be used as individual purpose setting to help learners engage in the material.

Special Considerations

Anticipatory set activities should not be the primary focus of the learning, but just used long enough to get the learner “ready to learn”. The lesson should then shift and focus on the primary objective(s) of the lesson.

Directions

Some examples for an anticipatory set include:

- Review of a previous lesson
- Open-ended and thought provoking question
- Pictures or cartoons
- A story or anecdote
- A demonstration

Prediction

Purpose

A prediction makes a statement or estimate about something that will happen in the future – to foretell, forecast, or prophesy. This active learning strategy engages learners by having them make a prediction about what they are about to learn.

Special Considerations

As more information is gathered or becomes available, you may allow learners to revise or change their predictions.

Directions

Before learners can make a prediction they must be given some information about the lesson. Prediction is often presented in the form of an example followed by a question or it may be just a simple question. For example: What do you think will happen?

Think, Pair, Share

Purpose

Think-Pair-Share is an effective strategy to help participants frame their thoughts and prepare them for sharing.

Special Considerations

With an odd number of participants, three can “pair” or the facilitator can become one of a pair.

Directions

Present the group with a question to consider. Instruct them to think about the question, to themselves, for a minute or so.

Next, ask the participants to turn to the person next to them, and share their thoughts for two or three minutes.

Ask for individuals to share their thoughts and/or discussions with the large group.

Jigsaw

Purpose

Jigsaw creates a group learning experience in which each individual has a purpose for learning, and a role in the learning of others.

Special Considerations

If you have an odd number of participants, you can assign resource people who will support the process (if you have experienced participants). Another option is to assign observers, who will report back on the process.

Yet another option is to assign co-Experts that will join Learning Groups together (so they “count” as one person). It works best to assign those co-Experts AFTER the learning has occurred.

Directions

Divide the large group into as many smaller groups as there are parts to the top – the “puzzle”. For example, if you are teaching bicycle safety and have identified 4 key concepts that participants will be learning, you would have 4 Expert Groups.

Each Expert Group will learn one of the key concepts, using the materials that you distribute to them. Each member in the group will be responsible for passing the information along to his or her Learning Group.

As individual Experts, each person will then join a Learning group, each made up of one member of each of the Experts Groups. To continue with the example used above with 4 Expert Groups in a large group of 28 participants, you would create 7 Learning Groups (one Expert per subject per group). In the Learning Groups, the Experts then teach back/share the material they have learned.

The Value Line

Purpose

The Value Line is a tool to that encourages participants to do one or more of the following:

- Focus thoughts on an issue
- Express opinions
- Appreciate the opinions of others

Special Considerations

In any situation where participants are expressing their opinions, it is incumbent upon the facilitator to provide a safe environment. This is especially critical if the facilitator is using the Value Line to elicit thoughts and ideas on sensitive subjects.

Directions

- Designate a portion of the meeting space as the Value Line. It can be an “imaginary line” or it can be delineated by a length of rope or tape on the floor.
- Instruct the participants that you will be reading a statement. After thinking about the statement, participants are to select where they stand on the issue by choosing a spot on the line.
- Instruct the participants to stand at the end of the line designated “strongly agree”, or somewhere along that line.
- Continue with more statements, if desired. Process the activity using the Experiential Learning model, if appropriate. The processing might focus either on content or life skill, depending on the purpose in using the Value Line.

Talking Chips

Purpose

Talking Chips is an active learning strategy that involves group discussion and requires that each participant contribute to the discussion. This leads to a richer and more equitable discussion while building listening and communication skills in the participants.

Special Considerations

Controlling participation can hinder the flow of a discussion and make it seem unnatural and artificial.

Directions

Learners are given a set number of chips or tokens and use them to participate in the discussion. Each time they contribute something they surrender one.

Scenarios

Purpose

There are two ways that scenarios can help to get learners actively involved in their learning. They connect new knowledge to the real world, and they help learners think about that knowledge from different perspectives.

Special Considerations

Scenarios need to be realistic and not overly complicated, and learners need to be able to “connect” with the characters.

Directions

Scenarios should be interesting and engaging and created in such a way that the learner is required to use new knowledge to solve a problem, sort out a dilemma, resolve an issue, or overcome a challenge. Scenarios should be realistic and help the learner to practice the application of new knowledge in a real world setting. Elements of a good scenario are:

- Tell a “real” story
 - Have an interesting plot
 - Lack an obvious or clear-cut right answer
 - Contain an element of conflict
 - Encourage learners to think and take a position
 - Demand a decision
 - Are relatively concise
 - Promote empathy of main characters
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Focused Listing

Purpose

Focused listing can be used for a variety of purposes. Most commonly it is used for one of the following:

- Pre-assessment
- Anticipatory Set
- Assessment of knowledge gained

Special Considerations

The “wait time” mentioned below, gives all participants a chance to develop their thoughts. For some individuals, once others start talking it is difficult to formulate their thoughts.

Directions

Introduce the topic or questions to the group. For example, “What are some things that motivate volunteers?”

Give them a minute or two to develop their responses.

Take responses from individuals in the group, writing ALL answers on flip chart paper, asking clarifying questions as necessary.