

Active Learning

What is Active Learning?

Active learning puts students at the heart of the learning experience. It enables them to be more engaged with their own learning. Bonwell and Eison (1991) defined active learning as any learning strategy that involves “students doing things, and thinking about the things they are doing” (p. 2).

We can create these active learning opportunities and environments through providing stimulating, challenging, collaborative, co-creation, and authentic, problem-based experiences. It is through this that students develop greater confidence and skills, and a deeper understanding of the topic.

Learn more about [interactive lectures](#).

The University motto is:

Experientia docet (Experience is the best teacher)

To do this, we need to consider the whole student life cycle, thinking about how we support all stages of this journey, providing learning opportunities that enable students to have hands on experiences.

Why do I need to think about this?

The [JISC Digital Experiences Insights Survey 2018](#) notes that while students enjoy a mix of learning styles, very few express a preference for studying collaboratively. Working with other people in digital spaces is vital in the workplace, so students should get used to it early on their course - supported by equivalent modes of assessment.

The Learning & Teaching Strategy sets out that the university will provide a sector-leading, dynamic and stimulating learning environment, which supports diverse learning needs and methods, and which encourages creativity and new forms of engagement and dialogue with our students.

How can you embed active learning into the curriculum?

Active learning is an approach, rather than a fixed set of activities. It can include any activity that encourages students to take an active, engaged part in the learning process within the classroom. Explore some of the examples below, while thinking about how these might be set as individual tasks as well as providing opportunities that enable students to work together collaboratively. This can help students to develop their communication and negotiation skills, as well as helping them gain a deeper understanding of a subject.

▪ **Potential Supporting Technology**

When setting students up in collaborative groups, there do not always have to be face to face meetings. Introduce students to the [Groups](#) area in Course Resources, [Blackboard Collaborate](#), or the [collaborative tools within Office 365](#). As this approach is becoming more common in the workplace, students can develop relevant skills that helps them to prepare for placements, employment, other learning opportunities and further simulations.

Skype and Webinar software such as [Blackboard Collaborate](#) can help create a live link up employers during class time. If you're not able to set up live meetings, use record a conversation with an employer to set the brief, or scenario.

In classroom screen sharing would be beneficial for small groups discussion, as it allows the students to share their work/research to the whole cohort using their own devices. This then allows larger collaboration and discussions with the cohort or with other smaller groups. Having this ability to cross collaborate using this technology could enhance the student experience by giving them a different approach to contribute to a session. Also, this type of collaboration can replicate a business environment, where this type of screen sharing is already embedded into industry.

Approaches to active learning practice include:

- **Co-creation** - Providing opportunities for students to become involved in the design, delivery and assessment of the curriculum.
- **Accessibility** - This refers to both the technical and pedagogical accessibility of learning and teaching. Where learning and teaching activities and resources can engage, include and support all students.

With technical accessibility meaning they can access or participate in the learning whether provided physically or digitally.

- **Global** - The curriculum has an international perspective 'to help prepare graduates to live in and contribute responsibly to a globally interconnected society'.
- **Applied Learning** - Learning is applied, experiential, transdisciplinary and assessment is authentic.
- **Flexible** - The programme is digitally fluent, has multi-modal delivery and provides student choice.
- **Inclusivity** - learning is universal and intended to improve the experience, skills and attainment of all students, within all aspects of the academic cycle.

▪ **Contents:**

- Debates
- Flipped Approach
- Live Brief
- Problem-based Learning
- Simulations

Debates

Debate in its simplest form requires a question, statement or idea with at least two opposing positions, each of which is defended against the others by an advocate, often with an impartial moderator ensuring that the discussion remains focused. This simplicity means that the approach can be used in a wide variety of settings and disciplines and allows students to explore and gain understanding of alternative viewpoints and, for the participants, develops communication, critical thinking and argumentation skills.

Learning Environment:

A circle or square configuration encourages wider participation in the debate by enabling the whole group to see and address each other directly.

A traditional classroom layout can also be used for debates, with the advocates positioned at the front and the rest of the cohort forming the audience.

Potential Supporting Technology

In-class polls, such as [Poll Everywhere](#) are well suited to debates, students can vote in real time to show how the arguments are swaying their opinion.

Debates can be recorded using [lecture capture](#) (with or without video), to enable students to review the debate and/or the debaters to reflect on their performance.

Flipped approach

Have students prepare for a classroom session in advance, for example by watching a video and answering guiding questions that provide prompts and support. This provides more opportunity to embed active learning activities during your face-to-face time with them. Then incorporate any of the suggested actives. You could use a 'flipped' session midway through a module as a revision session or for working on an assignment that you have previously set.

Learning environment:

A virtual learning environment, such as [Course Resources](#) would support the pre-class activity.

Within the class, depending on the tasks you set, have students sit in groups with plenty of space to enable you to walk around and interact with them.

Potential Supporting Technology

For more information about using technology to support this approach see - <https://digitalhandbook-restore-jan.wp-tst.derby.ac.uk/menu/other/flipped-learning/>

Live Brief

To gain the needed skills through real-world and experiential practices through authentic and applied learning approaches. Live briefs challenge students to examine different outcomes by supporting them to express their understanding and knowledge within complex and (often) problematic real-world scenarios. Allowing the students to recognise the consequences of their actions. By adapting

to real-live briefs provides students with the 21st Century skills every graduate need, along with equipping them for life-long learning.

There is growing importance on communities and businesses within the area working together with universities to improve the student's graduate skills and by using live briefs they can create an authentic learning environment by encompassing these together.

Learning environment:

Students can work in small groups within a standard classroom or work virtually on a live brief scenario outside of scheduled teaching time which will provide them with a more authentic approach to their future employment. Authenticity within learning creates a meaningful, valuable and enthusiasm learning style for the students to invest more effort into the process and allows for an active and student-led approach.

Potential supporting technology:

Students do not have to work face to face, but could explore online collaborative working to answer the live brief and share out tasks. Introduce students to the [Groups](#) area in Course Resources, [Blackboard Collaborate](#), or the [collaborative tools within Office 365](#). As this approach is becoming more common in the workplace, students can develop relevant skills that helps them to prepare for placements, employment, other learning opportunities and further simulations.

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Problem based Learning (PBL)

PBL provides students with opportunities to apply their knowledge to new situations. Set contextualized, ill-structured problems and ask students to work in groups to investigate and discover meaningful solutions. This challenges the students to negotiate roles, and share out tasks to break the problem down. Through PBL, students can develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, and it helps them understand how to apply knowledge to new situations.

Learning environments:

Depending on the tasks you set, have students sit in groups with plenty of space to enable you to walk around and interact with them.

Potential supporting technology:

Students do not have to work face to face, and could explore online collaborative working to resolve problems and share out tasks. As this approach is becoming more common in the workplace, students can develop relevant skills that helps them to prepare for placements, employment, other learning opportunities and further simulations.

Simulations

Simulations are widely used across subject areas at the University (e.g. Nursing, Law, Architecture). They provide students with the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence in completing authentic activities within a safe supported space. This helps them to see how these activities would translate into the workplace, providing them with the opportunity to become familiar with the practices, processes, equipment and environment typically involved in this work.

Learning environment:

The learning environment should, where possible, replicate that typically experienced when carrying out the practice being simulated. Creating an environment where these activities would typically take place helps to create authenticity for students. Specialist spaces may be required such as mock wards, a house, laboratory, court room or the spaces within the University can be adapted for this purpose providing spaces for group work or spaces for activities typically conducted outside.

Potential supporting technology:

Again, where possible, the technology should be used which is typical for the practice being simulated. This should incorporate new trends on the use of technology, which may not be seen in all work environments, but would be

important skills for the student to develop in order to thrive in the future. For instance, online collaborative working is becoming more common, so getting students to use the technologies that support this activity will develop the skills needed to work in this way. It helps them to prepare for placements, employment, other learning opportunities and further simulations.

Technology can also be used to mimic an aspect of a simulation that can be difficult to replicate in an authentic way. Using virtual and augmented reality can help to deliver these interactive elements within a simulation. For example, virtual patients, clients, witnesses or information can be delivered during the simulation, mimicking the interactions they would typically experience within a similar scenario in real life.

References

Bonwell, C. C., & Eison, J. A. (1991). *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, Washington DC: School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University.