

## Discussion opportunities

Passive listening can only be sustained for short periods of time. An effective learning session alternates between teacher-centred delivery and student centred reflection or activity. Giving students time to think and reflect reinforces concepts and allows students to confront what they do and do not understand. Paired discussion or activity breaks increase opportunities for active engagement with the material and other students through the expression of ideas.

By dividing your lectures into three or four sections, individual or pair-work activities can be incorporated into the structure to support consolidation and assimilation of concepts. They can also be used as a short lecture break drawing upon revision material. The following activities are suggestions only. Activities should be devised or adapted to support the lecture content or learning objectives.

### Think, pair, share

In the space of 2 to 5 minutes, students spend time thinking about the material presented at first on their own. Then on paper or orally they share their interpretation of this with the person seated next to them. They then discuss and negotiate omissions or differences in each other's versions.

Students may be slow to develop the language of their subject because they do not have opportunities to practice the vocabulary, or the confidence to do so in group tutorials. On a one to one basis, they can negotiate meanings and practice communicating their understanding in a less threatening situation. Opportunities to peer teach are invaluable for all students because teaching others is one of the most effective forms of active learning.

### Zippy brainstorm

Get students to brainstorm ideas or recall material in the space of 1 minute. This could be done individually or in pairs. This could be done as a list, a concept map or a process diagram. Ideally recalling material from one or two lectures ago would be most appropriate.

Brainstorming possibilities could be an interesting way to set the scene for forthcoming information. This process is a valuable reinforcement for vocabulary. Accessing vocabulary from memory makes it more quickly and easily available in the future.

## Wordle words

Present a collage of key terms and concepts that have been used to date within a unit. An attractive slide can be created in minutes using the following site: <http://www.wordle.net/>. Your Wordle collage denotes the key ideas for the course and builds in an ongoing and recursive revision process.

Students work in pairs to choose, define and explain each of the words in the Wordle word cloud. (The words that remain unchosen may be the most telling.) This is a passive activity for revising vocabulary, but active in negotiating definitions with the partner.

## Switch context

This can be a variation of the brainstorm activity.

Specifically the teacher challenges the students to think of the material or issue under discussion from a different point of view or in a different context; e.g. in nursing, challenge the students to consider how a situation would play out with a patient who did not speak English, challenge student teachers to take the perspective of the parent; challenge accountancy students to see the legal or ethical implications, rather than the financial ones, of a business decision.

This task challenges students to express more complex and hypothetical discourse which is necessary for critical thinking.

## How did I do?

Encourage metacognitive awareness by getting students to score their own understanding of the material on a scale of 1 to 10.

They can share this with their partner but more importantly they need to articulate what or where their confusion lies. This process may resolve their own confusion or allow their partner to clarify the point that they do not understand. If a group has a common point of confusion, they will be more empowered to speak up or seek help in a timely way.