

## WHAT IS IT?

Simply put, active learning can be described as, “students doing things and thinking about what they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991, p. 2). In active learning there is an emphasis on developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity to solve challenging questions or problems. Active learning activities can range from discussions, debates, and role plays to more complex structured strategies such as case-based, project-based, and problem-based learning.

## WHY USE IT?

Research into active learning has shown that implementing a range of strategies and techniques can lead to significant learning gains. The aim of active learning is to provide opportunities for students to think critically, become more aware of how best they learn, and prepare for the challenges of professional situations. Many lecturers who engage their students in active learning find their classes are lively, interesting, and engaging for all involved. They also note the increase in depth and quality of students' work (see UQ Lectures case studies in [Flipped Classroom Case Studies](#)<sup>↗</sup>).

## HOW TO DO IT?

Bonwell and Eison (1991) suggest that teachers can promote active learning through:

- student involvement beyond mere listening,
- emphasis on facilitating the development of skills and less focus on information transfer,
- student involvement in activities that emphasise higher order thinking skills, and
- students' exploration of values and attitudes.

The amount of time you spend designing and delivering active learning will depend on the needs of your course and the resources you have available. There are many short teaching strategies that can be introduced into your face-to-face sessions (i.e. lectures, tutorials) with minimal effort including:

- think-pair-share
- the minute paper
- the jigsaw technique
- mind mapping.

More complex or structured strategies can take longer to plan and design and are often associated with assessment if they are central to the course. Some examples of these are:

- case-based learning
- peer learning
- enquiry-based learning
- problem-based learning
- project-based learning.

For specific resources for each of these active learning strategies, see the Active Learning Practices toolkit in *The FAB Classroom* on Learn.UQ.



## WHAT IF I WANT MORE?

- [What is Active Learning?](#) [video 4:12] - Northwest Iowa Community College
- [Active Learning Classrooms: Everyone is engaged!](#) [video 5:33] - McGill University
- [Classroom activities for Active Learning](#) - University of Michigan
- Drinkwater, M. J., Gannaway, D., Sheppard, K., Davis, M. J., Wegener, M. J., Bowen, W. P., & Corney, J. F. (2014). Managing Active Learning Processes in Large First Year Physics Classes: The Advantages of an Integrated Approach. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry: The ISSOTL Journal*, 2(2), 75–90. doi:10.2979/teachlearningqu.2.2.75
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