

Practical advice for enhancing
your teaching and learning

Activities for
learning

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What can you use learning activities for?

Learning activities are tasks designed specifically to improve student learning.

Learning activities can be used:

- for reinforcement and remediation.
- as tasks to clarify understanding of difficult concepts.
- to guide students' preparation for lectures and tutorials.
- as extension and support material.

Learning activities can be completed individually or collaboratively, and in-class or out of class. They can be paper-based, online or centred around media resources.

Why should you use learning activities?

Well designed learning activities are useful because they:

- encourage active learning, rather than passive learning.
- promote deep learning, rather than surface learning.
- enable students to internalise their new knowledge.
- provide opportunities for students to reflect on the content of the course.
- reinforce, revise and improve learning.
- help students make links between learning outcomes, content and assessment.
- integrate content across different areas of the course.
- keep motivation and interest levels high.
- suggest alternative ways of learning (that is, besides reading, researching and collecting information).

Guidelines for designing effective learning activities

When designing learning activities, provide:

- **A good purpose to complete the activity**
For example, "your responses will be useful for your next assignment".
- **Links to the learning outcomes**
Give some guidance as to how the activity relates to the learning outcomes for the course.
- **An explanation of how to respond to the activity**
For example, "make brief notes of key issues from the reading".
- **Resources needed to complete the activity**
Advise students what resources they may require before attempting the activity.
- **Learning activities situated within the content of the course**
This may help students easily make links from theory to practice.

What types of learning activities can you use?

The types of learning activities are only limited by your imagination but some ideas are:

- Surveying or interviewing fellow students, colleagues or family about a particular issue.
- Compiling a portfolio of relevant resources such as websites or newspaper articles.
- Writing about and reflecting on one's own experiences and opinions about a central issue, and then comparing these to the views held by institutions, relevant leaders in the field, etc.
- Completing tables or grids, for example, a table to compare similarities and differences from theoretical readings.
- Keeping a learning journal, which might include notes on readings, ideas for assignments and reflections on the content of the course.
- Short answers to questions which review the content of the course, associated readings or lectures.

- Carrying out fieldwork or making local observations.
- Constructing sample questions based on mathematical problems, legal cases or moral dilemmas in medical practice.
- Activities based on other media such as audiotapes, videotapes, computer disks, CD-ROMs, photographs or lab equipment.
- Role playing activities, for example, an accountant advising a client on recent tax changes.
- Collecting notes on readings, journal articles or legal cases under categories provided.
- Checklists and quizzes to verify factual knowledge.
- Short case studies, for example, providing a psychological diagnosis on a given set of circumstances.
- Self assessment activities to check if learning outcomes have been achieved.
- Drawing flow charts, diagrams or concept maps to summarise content, readings or lectures.

What is a global learning activity?

Global learning activities guide the content of a course by providing a sustained scenario through a series of related thematic tasks. This could be a situation, story or theme that can be referred to throughout the unit and can be the basis for many student activities. For example, in a course that covers business management, the students may be asked to assume the role of manager and perform various authentic tasks.

The advantages of using global learning activities are:

- Students learn in authentic and realistic contexts.
- The links between different sections of the content become clearer to the students.
- Once the situation is chosen, it is relatively straightforward to create activities to fit the theme.
- Such activities are more adaptable for different locations, cultures, topics and student requirements.
- Assessment tasks can be based on a global learning activity.

How can you provide feedback on learning activities?

Providing students with feedback about their responses to learning activities can dramatically improve the quality of learning that takes place. This might occur face-to-face, through written comments or online.

Feedback may be provided through:

- model answers or exemplars.
- peer review (formal or informal).
- expert advice, for example, an accountant commenting on a business plan.
- the activity itself, for example, the trial and error processes necessary for some activities to be completed may in themselves provide automatic feedback to students.

What is the theory behind good learning activities?

The constructivist theory of learning provides a sound theoretical basis for creating worthwhile learning activities. According to constructivists, good learning activities will include at least some of the following characteristics:

- **Multiple points of view are provided**
Exposing students to various perspectives on the same idea enables them to make comparisons and draw conclusions.
- **Realistic, relevant and based on practice**
When students can see the links between their study and the real world, their learning becomes more meaningful and they are more motivated.
- **Presents content in different ways**
Students learn in varying ways, for example, some students learn more effectively using audio-visual resources while others prefer text based material.

- **Allows students to construct their own understanding**
It is more effective for students to develop their own understanding rather than being “spoon-fed” information.
- **Provides ownership of learning to students**
Providing activities incorporating choices means students feel more in control of their learning.
- **Allows for self-awareness of the learning process**
When students use metacognitive skills, such as planning and monitoring, their performance often improves, for example, writing in a learning journal may help students to be aware of the processes they use to study and learn.

For more information

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