

25 Instructional Strategies For College Courses

Make learning active, engaging
and motivating for higher ed students



TOP HAT

ACTIVE LEARNING INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

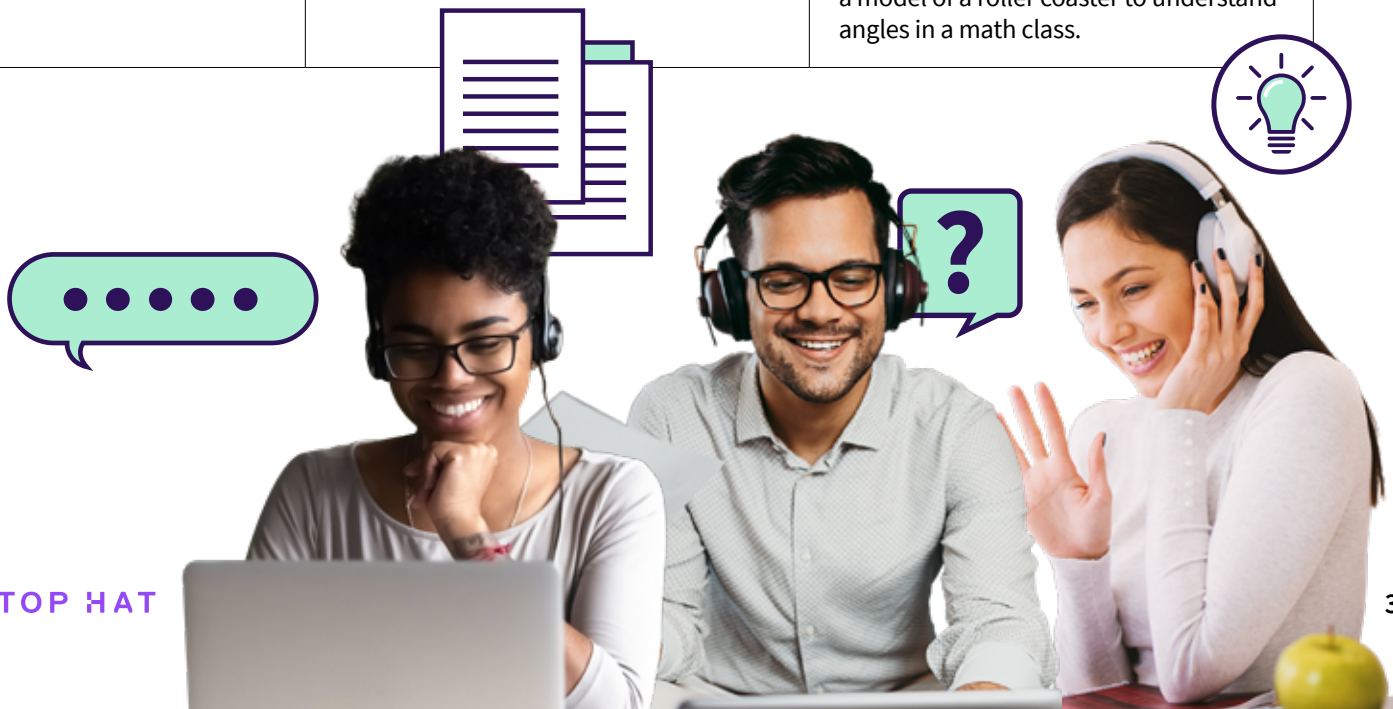
Activity	What is it?	How to put it into practice
1. Exit ticket	Before leaving class, students respond to a question related to the lesson of the day.	Ask students to write down an answer to a posed question on an index card. Collect the cards and use this information to inform future instruction.
2. Flipped classroom	Students view pre-recorded lectures prior to class. In-class time is dedicated to discussions and problem solving.	Upload lectures to YouTube or your LMS in advance of class. Use group work and presentations during class to get students talking with one another.
3. Journals and learning logs	A written record of students' thoughts, feelings and reflections on various topics.	Encourage students to use a Google Doc or a note-sharing platform like Evernote to record their thoughts, questions and ideas at the end of each class. Alternatively, assign this activity as homework.
4. Minute papers	A written reflection that responds to an assigned question. This can be used as a reflection or comprehension exercise.	Pose a question about your lecture and give students a minute to respond, either on their own or in partners. An alternative: Ask students what questions they still have at the end of class.
5. Muddiest point	Students reflect on what part of the course material they're finding most difficult.	Using index cards or an app, ask students to submit their answers. Once you have a list of concepts, consider asking students to pick a term to explain to the class after a review session.
6. Reflection	Students consider what they learned by responding to a course-related question of your choice.	Ask students to respond to a question like "what did you learn today?" or "what did you find the most interesting?" at the end of class.
7. Think-pair-share	Students partner up in the middle of class and respond to an assigned question. Then they share their answers with the rest of the class.	Prepare questions in advance of lecture—ones that instill debate work best. Give students five minutes to discuss in pairs before presenting their observations to the class.

ASSESSMENT-BASED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Activity	What is it?	How to put it into practice
8. Assessment	Graded tests, quizzes or projects that let students demonstrate what they've learned.	Tests, quizzes, polls, discussions, projects and exams are all ways to evaluate student knowledge, both formally and informally.
9. Cubing	Students roll a cube and respond to a question written on one of the six sides.	Prepare a batch of questions (in multiples of six) that encourage students to apply, compare and reflect on course material. Write these questions on each side of the cube and away you go.
10. Grade as you go	Students grade an array of their own low-stakes assessments throughout the term to recognize their learning gaps.	Run a series of small assessments versus the one big exam. For students with a superior understanding of the material, let them advance to a more challenging assignment. By the time students complete their next assignment, it's likely that the entire class will be ready to master a new concept.
11. Homework practice	Small assignments, which are facilitated outside of class time, help students master concepts reviewed during class.	Assign homework (reflection exercises, journaling or short essays) based on skill level and areas in which students need more practice.
12. Questions and quizzes	Questions of varying complexity are used as a type of formative assessment to gauge student understanding.	Pose questions before, during and after class to assess comprehension. These questions may form a quiz, which students can answer using polling software. It's best to not attach a grade to these comprehension checks.

GROUP INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Activity	What is it?	How to put it into practice
13. Case studies	Students apply the knowledge they've gained to real-world scenarios, helping them see the relevance of your course content.	Choose a set of case studies in advance of class—current news stories are a good bet. Split students into groups of four or five in class and ask students to respond to a set of questions that get them discussing the assigned story.
14. Debates	Provide a structured form of argumentation that enables students to present compelling and convincing statements about an assigned topic.	Ask students to research a topic in advance of class and present their position in a justifiable way. Ask students who have a contrary viewpoint to the person that spoke before them to share next.
15. Peer instruction	Students prepare and lead lectures in a creative way.	Ask students to choose a specific topic listed in your syllabus. Have students deliver a 15–20 minute presentation at the beginning of that particular class to share their knowledge on that area.
16. Role play	Using a simulation or game, students are given a chance to show the knowledge they've acquired on a unit of study.	Depending on your discipline, choose appropriate role play scenarios for students to take on. This might include dissecting an animal via an online simulation in a biology class or designing a model of a roller coaster to understand angles in a math class.



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS

Activity	What is it?	How to put it into practice
17. Curriculum compacting	Educators spend less time on topics that students have advanced knowledge of and instead spend more time on areas where students lack confidence.	Use diagnostic assessments to gauge students' pre-existing knowledge of a unit of study. Based on the results, form your introductory unit-specific lectures accordingly.
18. Independent study project	Students focus on a single course concept and prepare a paper, project or proof of concept and then present their work to the class.	Assign students a topic that relates to your course content. Give students three-to-four weeks to prepare their project and then have them present a 20-minute presentation to the class.

TIERED INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Activity	What is it?	How to put it into practice
19. Tiered activities	Three or four sequential assignments, which are each more difficult than the last, are used to help students achieve subject mastery.	Start the course by facilitating a simple activity like a basic physics experiment. Next, facilitate a slightly more challenging activity along with a simplified version for students still working to fully master that concept.
20. Tiered rubrics	Students are graded based on their current level of understanding, with point values adjusted on a student level.	Prepare two or three rubrics that all contain the same categories, but have different grade weights based on a beginner, intermediate and superior level of understanding. Additionally remove some requirements for students who need further review.

ORGANIZATION INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Activity	What is it?	How to put it into practice
21. Agendas	A calendar that encompasses assignments, projects and tests that students need to complete throughout a course.	Provide students with a blank calendar at the start of the semester. Ask learners to create their own assignment workback, making sure they meet predetermined assignment due dates.
22. Anchor activities	Through a series of activities, including re-answering previously posed questions or discussing observations with a partner, students gain a deeper understanding of a concept or skill.	At the start or end of class, facilitate an activity like a quiz, discussion or other exercise like drawing a diagram or listing topic-specific items. The goal is to help students absorb as much as possible about the topic that has been, or will be, discussed.
23. Knowledge charts	Students reflect on what they've already learned and what topics they want to learn more about in your course.	Using a handout or Google Doc, ask students to spend ten minutes completing this exercise at the start of the course. Consider facilitating this exercise periodically to gauge interest in a topic and to check your own progress in meeting student needs.
24. Learning contracts	Students devise their own timelines towards completing various parts of an assignment.	Give students a blank calendar at the start of each assignment and ask them to complete a workback for their deliverables. Consider hosting one-on-one meetings with students to help them devise manageable timelines.
25. Portfolio development	Students gather, organize and illustrate examples of their learning and accomplishments throughout the semester.	Ask students to keep a record of all their assignments. At the end of the course, encourage students to include the pieces they are most proud of in a binder, scrapbook or other organizer.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO TEACH YOUR COURSE

Use Top Hat to increase engagement and keep students motivated and connected

One platform, one less thing to manage

Take attendance, present slides, host discussions, give homework, assign interactive readings and run tests—all in one place. (Phew!)

Crank engagement up to 11

Make learning active with live discussions, polls and quizzes students can respond to on any device. Videos, GIFs and 3D images can easily be added to your course materials, so you'll always have plenty of tricks up your sleeve.

Assess your class early and often

Let instant feedback from polls, quizzes and assignments guide your teaching. Save time with question packs and auto-grading, and run secure in-class tests or remote proctored exams. Plus, get insights to support class and individual progress. Reaching out to struggling students is only a click away.

[Learn more](#) about the capabilities of the Top Hat platform.
[Click here](#) to get a personalized demonstration of Top Hat.

**We empower educators to engage students
and unleash their potential.**



TOP HAT