

## Planning an Active Learning Activity

When planning an active learning activity, answering the following questions will help you clarify your goals and structure.

- What are your objectives for the activity?
- Who will be interacting? Will students pair up with someone beside them or someone sitting behind/in front of them? Should they pair up with someone with a different background? Someone they don't know yet?
- When does the activity occur during the class? Beginning? Middle? End? How much time are you willing to spend on it?
- Will students write down their answers/ideas/questions or just discuss them?
- Will students turn in the responses or not? If they are asked to turn them in, should they put their names on them?
- Will you give individuals a minute or so to reflect on the answer before discussing it or will they just jump right into a discussion?
- Will you grade their responses or not?
- How will students share the paired work with the whole class? Will you call on individuals randomly or will you solicit volunteers?
- If students are responding to a question you pose, how are you going to ensure that they leave with confidence in their understanding? (Often, if various student answers are discussed without the instructor explicitly indicating which ones are "right," students become frustrated. Even with a question that has no absolute "right" answer, students want to know what the instructor's stand on the question is.)
- What preparation do you need to use the activity? What preparation do the students need in order to participate fully?

## Keys to Success

- Be creative! Invent new strategies and adapt existing ones to your needs.
- Start small and be brief.
- Develop a plan for an active learning activity, try it out, collect feedback, then modify and try it again.
- Start from the first day of class and stick with it. Students will come to expect active learning and perform better.
- Be explicit with students about why you are doing this and what you know about the learning process.
- Request students vary their seating arrangements to increase their chances to work with different people. Have students occasionally pair up with the student behind them, since friends often sit side by side.
- Use questions from in class activities on tests. For example, include a short essay question that was used in a think/pair/share.
- Negotiate a signal for students to stop talking.
- Randomly call on pairs to share.
- Find a colleague or two to plan with (and perhaps teach with) while you're implementing active learning activities.
- Continue learning through workshops, reading, and practice.