

Effective Practices for Designing and Implementing Asynchronous Active Learning Activities



GOAL: Consider the benefits and ideal uses of asynchronous active learning and various aspects of designing and implementing effective asynchronous active learning activities.

What is active learning?

Active learning is an umbrella term that encompasses several different teaching approaches, all of which shift the focus from the teacher delivering the course content to the student actively participating in their learning and interacting with the course content and each other. Active learning involves students “doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).




Why use asynchronous active learning activities?

Asynchronous active learning activities offer students:

- ✓ more time to think deeply and respond in more intentional and thoughtful ways
- ✓ increased accessibility and flexibility for how and when to participate in conversations and activities
- ✓ opportunities for dialogue and connection with the instructor and other students
- ✓ guidance, structure, and feedback for their learning between synchronous sessions

For a general overview of the **benefits of active learning**, see our [Synchronous Active Learning handout](#).


Where might asynchronous active learning activities work best in my course?

 BEFORE synchronous sessions	 AFTER synchronous sessions	 ONGOING throughout the course
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • respond to course materials (readings, recorded lectures, videos) • share questions and ideas • check understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practice and apply knowledge and skills • continue dialogue from synchronous session • reflect on learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare for assessments (e.g., ask questions, build a collaborative study guide) • support students' self-regulation and self-directed learning





It’s all about balance! In courses with a mix of [synchronous and asynchronous engagement modes](#), it’s important to intentionally design and [balance each of these elements](#).

How do I select an asynchronous active learning activity for my course?

Key elements to consider:

- the purpose of the activity, particularly related to course learning outcomes and assessments
- class context (class size, delivery/engagement mode)
- duration of the activity and impact on other aspects of your course
- is the activity repeated (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly) or a one-time activity?
- type of interaction: 

Worksheet 2: Selecting Asynchronous Active Learning Activities guides you through the selection process

Student—Content 	Student—Student 	Student—Self 	Student—Instructor 
e.g., post reactions or questions about content	e.g., peer review, group brainstorming	e.g., self-reflection, self-assessment	e.g., ask questions, get feedback



Checklist for designing and implementing asynchronous active learning activities

DESIGN

- **Start small:** Begin with quick, low stakes (or no stakes) activities so that you and your students get comfortable with new ways of learning
- **Start with your students in mind:** What's their prior knowledge of the topic? What level of guidance will they need? What's their experience with active learning activities?
- **Accessibility:** Minimize barriers to participation and offer diverse ways for students to engage
- **Technology:** What technologies and tools will you and your students need?
- **Group management:** If using groups, how are groups formed, how will support be offered to all groups throughout the activity, and how will you set groups up for success?
- **Timing:** How much time is needed for students to complete the activity? Will the activity be repeated throughout the semester?
- **Deliverables and assessment:** What contributions or deliverables do you want from the activity? How many submissions are expected (e.g., each individual, one per group)? Will they be graded?

INTRODUCE THE ACTIVITY

- **Be transparent:** Explain why you're incorporating this activity, the goals and intended benefits of the activity, how it will be assessed, and how it connects to the course outcomes and assessments
- **Introduce the activity:** Provide clear instructions, guidelines and expectations, especially for group activities.
- **Specify deliverables and assessment:** Provide clear instructions for submissions, what constitutes an appropriate and successful submission, and grading or feedback information.
- **Clarify your role:** Inform students of how, when, and where they can get support for the activity

FACILITATE THE ACTIVITY

- **Be present:** Provide guidance and support, particularly from groups or individuals who seem stuck or are not participating
- **Clarify common questions and misconceptions:** Provide clarification to the whole class when there is confusion or if similar questions are arising
- **Wrap up and debrief:** Gather feedback from students about how the activity went, and reflect on what went well and what needs to be changed

Addressing Student Resistance to Active Learning

Students may resist active learning due to prior negative experiences or because active learning shifts their expectations and experiences regarding their role during synchronous class time. To address or prevent student resistance to active learning and to encourage participation:

- Explain the purpose of the activity and potential benefits or value for students
- Preview what might be challenging
- Clearly describe the process and what students are expected to do and produce
- Invite questions
- Provide support and guidance by checking in with students



Additional Resources

[Interacting Asynchronously](#), Vanderbilt University

[Actively Engaging Students in Asynchronous Online Classes](#), IDEA Paper #64

[Asynchronous Strategies for Inclusive Teaching](#), Brown University

