Throughout your course, you will want to include a variety of activities to keep your students engaged and get them to apply their skills in different ways. We have created a collection of activities for you to choose from. Use this to discover new ideas for practice activities that you can include in your course.

**Quick reminder:** Don’t just use an activity because it sounds fun. Make sure the activity makes sense for your course and the skill you are trying to teach.

**Overview:**

**Activities at the start of a new topic:**
- Activating Questions
- Ask Your Own Questions
- Brainstorms
- Goal Writing

**Activities to apply and practice newly learned skills:**
- Active Observation and Analysis
- Case Study
- Challenge
- Find the Mistake (and “fix” it)
- Given a solution, design the problem
- Problem Set
- Pro/Con Analysis
- Project
- Reflection Questions
- Structured Listening / Structured Reading
- Tutorial Tours
- Worksheet

**Activities to reflect on what was learned:**
- Learning Diary
- Learning Log
Activities at the start of a new topic:

Activating Questions

Activating questions are meant to get students in the right frame of mind for learning. Activating questions should usually come before a tutorial or lecture to help students start thinking about what they already know and prepare them to learn. In answering these questions, students will activate their brains by reflecting on knowledge they already have that will be useful to them in learning new material. When writing activating questions, think about the background knowledge students should have before learning this material, or the prior experiences or knowledge you used when you were first learning this subject, and formulate questions that prompt students to activate that knowledge.

Goals

› Get students thinking about what they already know
› Activate knowledge students already have that will help them learn new material
› Make learning easier and more relatable by helping students see connections to things they already know.
› Create a hook to make the students curious to find out more in the next lecture or section

Examples

› Get your students to recognize where they’re starting at in your topic by having them make a list, or define a term.
› Ask your students to answer a question or describe a concept that seems easy, but actually isn’t. This might help you catch your students in a common error or false answer.
› Ask your students to write down the reasons why they’re taking your course. Ask them to write down what they’re most excited to learn.

Duration

~5–10 min.

Materials needed

Computer or pen/pencil and paper to answer questions and take notes.

How to give feedback

› Ask your students to share their responses to the activating questions in a post
› Encourage students to read other students’ posts
› Reply to the posts and comment on students’ answers, correcting any information that might be wrong.
› Sometimes activating questions are subjective and based on a student’s experience, so you can reply to their answers with your own commentary on how their prior experience will be useful in learning what they’re about to learn.

Good for: Experience-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course

Ask Your Own Questions

You can use this activity at the beginning of your course to get the students to start thinking about the topic, their knowledge gaps, and what they want to get out of the course. Ask your students to write down at least one and at maximum 5 questions they want to have answered after this course. You can ask your students to send these questions to you or share them on the Q&A board (this can
also help you identify gaps in your course that you might want to address). At the end of the course you should ask your students to go back to their questions and attempt to answer them. You can then attempt to answer all remaining open questions.

**Goals:**
- Activate prior knowledge and get in the right mindset for the topic
- Intensify the motivation for the course by creating a desire to find answers to the questions
- Get an insight into what students want from your course, and be able to address their questions in future versions of your course

**Duration:**
~10min

**Materials needed:**
- Computer or pen/pencil and paper to write down questions and take notes.
- Maybe a downloadable sheet where they can enter their questions

**How to give feedback:**
- Ask your students to send these questions to you or share them on the Q&A board
- Prompt your students to look at the questions at the end of your course and be available for any remaining unanswered questions

**Good for:** Competence-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course

**Brainstorms**

Brainstorms allow students to generate as many ideas as possible when they are learning about a new topic or gearing up to solve a problem. Brainstorms are a great choice for a low-risk activity that can help students feel a sense of accomplishment and ownership over their own ideas.

**Goal:**
- Generate many ideas
- Free students from committing to a particular idea or solution
- Break up a difficult problem into more manageable steps

**Time Needed:** 3–5 minutes

**Materials Needed:**
Computer or pen/pencil and paper to write down questions and take notes.

**How to give feedback:**
- You can provide a sample brainstorm so that students know whether they are on the right track.
- Acknowledge the variety of potential answers students can give.

**Good for:** Competence-based course, experience-based course
Goal Writing

Goal writing allows your students to enter into your course with a specific plan of action. They are a great low-rigor activity that students can do at the very beginning of your course (within the first 10 minutes).

Goal:
› Help students consider how a course applies to their own personal interests
› Motivate students to complete the course

Time Needed: 3-5 minutes

Materials Needed:
Notetaking materials: push students to write down their goals on a piece of paper. Research shows that students are more likely to remember something if they write it down, instead of just typing it.

How to give feedback: Students may take your course for a variety of reasons, and therefore, their goals will vary. Providing a sample of a variety of goals is great for students who need more help coming up with a concrete goal. Reminding your students about their goals halfway through the course and encouraging them to revise and/or stick to their original goals is also a best practice.

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course

Active Observation and Analysis

In active observation and analysis, students observe a situation they have learned about and analyze what is happening. Students can observe groups of people performing a task they have learned about, observe a process, a finished product, or even an object or animal and analyze what’s going on based on what they’ve learned. In the analysis, students should use what they learned to describe what they are observing, make insights about what they are observing, and identify any problems or areas for improvement. Instructors can guide students in observation and analysis by providing them with activating questions, things to think about, and reflection questions that help them know what they should look for and what they should be thinking about.

Goals
› Students can apply their learning to a real situation without specific guidance from an instructor.
› Students think critically about their observations to make insights about what they are seeing and analyze those insights to understand how something works or can be improved.
› Students gain deeper understanding of what they are observing through critical analysis.

Examples
In an art history course, the instructor could provide a picture of Picasso’s Guernica, and prompt students to observe and analyze the painting with the questions that require students to both observe and analyze the painting:
› What do you notice about the colors of the painting? Why do you think Picasso chose to use such a limited color palette?
› What are the most noticeable objects or people in the painting? What could these objects or people symbolize?
› How large is the painting? Why do you think Picasso chose to make a painting this size?
Duration
Varies, 15 min is a good length

Materials needed
- Videos or images of what students are observing
- Computer or pen/pencil and paper to take notes and answer questions

How to give feedback
- Ask students to share their observations and analysis in a post
- Reply to students’ observations and analyses and correct any incorrect statements or make a comment on any observations or insights they may have missed.

Good for: Competence-based course, experience-based course, thought-based course

Case Study

In this activity students practice decision making in their field of study on an actual or realistic case. You need to find or create such a case and present it to students in a video lecture or in writing. Then ask your students to write down how they would act in or respond to this case.

Variation: Instead of asking your students to write an open ended response, you could also turn this into a Multiple Choice question and give them a few responses to choose from.

Goal:
- Transfer knowledge to make it actionable in real life
- Practice real-life decision making

Examples:
1. Communication course: Your direct-report is showing up late every day. You know she is currently going through some personal issues, but this is affecting her work performance and you want to talk to her. How do you approach the conversation?
2. Graphic design course: You’re working for a consulting business and your boss just sent you a design draft for their new logo. Write a response email to your boss addressing what you like about the logo and what needs to be improved.
3. Marketing course: Matthew’s website is showing up on page 2 of google search, what can he do to bring it to page 1?

Duration:
~30min

Materials needed:
Case Study

How to give feedback:
- Have students upload their response to the discussion board for peer-feedback
- Talk about some solutions in next lecture
- Show your students which lecture(s) to review if they feel like they need to go over the topic again
- For variation with multiple choice quiz: Still show your students which lecture to review if they got the wrong answer

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course
Challenge

A challenge asks your students to do something that helps them practice what they learned in your course. A challenge does not necessarily have a tangible outcome.

Goals:
- Apply skills in real life
- Form new behavior patterns

Examples:
Fitness course: Get up tomorrow and go running before breakfast, cook without carbs for a week
Personal Development: Build one mini habit, stand up to your colleague at work
Relationship: Next time you fight with your partner, do x instead of y

Duration:
varies, from 10min to multiple weeks/ongoing (habit change)

Materials needed:
Worksheet to keep track of challenges and reflect on experience

How to give feedback:
- Have students share their experience of the challenge on the discussion board
- Reply to their posts, applaud their courage and be supportive
- Encourage other students to reply, too

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course

Find the Mistake (and “fix” it)

While it’s important for students to observe and analyze people doing a task well, it’s equally important for students to recognize errors and know how to fix them. In error analysis activities, students examine videos, images, writing samples, snippets of code, etc. to identify errors and explain how to fix them. This kind of activity helps students apply their knowledge by thinking critically about what they know and using their knowledge to solve problems. In these kinds of activities, it’s very important that the students demonstrate that they know why something is an error and why the solution they present works.
A variation of this activity is Improve an Answer, where you provide students with a problem and a mediocre answer. Then the student’s task is to turn the answer from mediocre to great.

Goals
- Test students’ detailed understanding of a concept
- Students think critically about what they’ve learned and successfully identify errors when they find them.
- Students know how to fix and avoid errors.
- Understand why the error is wrong.
- Understand why the solution works.
Examples

> In a SQL course, instructors could provide students with a query and information on what that query is supposed to do, and ask students to find any errors in syntax or logic in the query and rewrite the query so it’s correct.
> In a language course, instructors can provide students with sample sentences or paragraphs and ask students to identify grammar or vocabulary errors and correct them.
> This activity can be incredibly specific (e.g. spot this mistake in these lines of code) or more general (e.g. how would you edit this introductory paragraph of a personal memoir?)

Duration
5–20 min.

Materials needed
Sample of error. Can be a writing sample, code snippet, video, image, etc.

How to give feedback
How to give feedback: Make sure to provide a solutions key or walk through the problem yourself. For activities with fewer concrete answers (e.g. editing a paragraph), provide multiple ways to "solve" or improve the problem.

Good for
Competence-based course, experience-based course, solution-based course

Given a solution, design the problem

By providing a solution and not a problem to solve, an instructor activates a deeper level of problem-solving and the student is required to apply what they know in a different way. By analyzing the components of a solution and working backwards to find a problem that matches, it is like providing a complete picture and then making the puzzle pieces to create a puzzle.

Goal:
> Apply reasoning and content knowledge to analyze why the solution exists
> Breakdown the solution into components that highlight key learnings
> Determine the question or problem that the solution exists for and then, propose the problem to solve that could lead to that solution

Examples:
For a web development course, this could mean: Given a feature of a web application, determine why the feature must be part of the application & what problem it solves. So, what would happen if it wasn’t there?

Time Needed: 15 minutes

Materials Needed:
Problem and solution

How to give feedback:
Post creating the problem that leads to that solution, provide an explanation and demo of how you, the instructor, came to the problem that you propose for that solution

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course
Problem Set

When learning discrete skills, it is helpful to follow the mantra “repeat to remember, remember to repeat.” By providing multiple opportunities to practice problem solving, a learner has the chance to apply what they know in various levels of difficulty and over more time.

Goal:
- Provide multiple opportunities to apply a set of skills in problem solving
- Create various levels of problems to solve using the same skills in order to advance from the starting level to solving problems with more complexity. Always start with the starting level problems and build up to more complexity; this method is not effective if you start with a mix of easy, medium, difficult complexity

Examples:
- Programming course: Students work through 10 different coding exercises which require the same skill
- Piano course: Students play 2 or 3 piano songs of the same learning level to practice the same chords.

Time Needed: ~30min-1hr

Materials Needed:
Set of problems at different levels of complexity

How to give feedback:
- For problems with one correct solution, provide a solution key. Maybe as a PDF.
- For problems with multiple solutions, provide a solution key with context. Maybe as a PDF.

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course

Pro/Con Analysis

A pro/con analysis is a specific activity that tests students’ knowledge of a topic on a deeper level. Based on a problem that you introduce, students will list out the pros and cons, before deciding on a final course of action. This activity is particularly well-suited for courses that teach decision-making on some level, including management, leadership, entrepreneurship, and health & wellness.

Goal:
- Helps students break down a major decision before making a final choice
- Encourage students to approach decisions in more rational and mindful manner

Time Needed: 5-7 minutes

Materials Needed:
For a more complex pro/con analysis, you can provide a sample pros and cons chart as a PDF resource.

How to give feedback: Give students a time constraint for this activity so they can generate as many pros and cons as they can. Provide a sample pro and a sample con to guide students. Encourage students to create an actual pros and cons chart on a piece of paper; making this activity more concrete will help students internalize the content more effectively.

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course
Project
If your course topic allows for it, a great way for students to build up skills is by working on a project. You can break a big project into small pieces, and help your students build each piece bit by bit throughout the entire course, or you can have final project at the end.

Goals:
- Students apply the skills they learned in the course
- Students can compare their work with yours to see if they’re on the right track

Examples:
- Programming course: Create an app, a website, a game
- Art course: Create a painting, crochet a hat, write a novel, build a sculpture
- Environmental course: Come up with a plan for your business to be “green” in <5 years and write a project plan

Duration:
varies, anything from 1hr to multiple weeks

Materials needed:
- Varies, but be sure you provide student with a list of materials and tools they need (ideally before they start the course)
- For tech courses it can be helpful to guide students through the setup of their environment

How to give feedback:
- Have students upload (pictures of) their project on the Q&A board
- Encourage other students to comment on their classmate’s projects
- Show examples of good projects and ask students to compare their work against those
- Regularly highlight the “projects of the month”

Good for: Competence-based course, experience-based course

Reflection Questions
Reflection questions are an effective, low-effort way to get your students engaged with the content you’re teaching them. By asking students to reflect on questions related to your content, you are getting students to reflect on how the concepts you’re teaching relate to them: whether you ask students to recall a time they faced a particular challenge, or to imagine themselves in a different life situation.

Student Goals:
- Engage with course ideas by reflecting on students’ own experiences related to the course content
- Allow for revelations about course content through personal reflection

Materials Needed:
Paper/pen or computer
How to Give Feedback

- The nice thing about reflection questions is that there is no right answer. Even still, you may want to provide students with examples or potential answers to the questions just to spark their thinking.
- Even more important is providing students actions they can take after their reflection to continue to change their behavior or their life.

**Good for:** Competence-based course, experience-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course

Structured Listening / Structured Reading

There are parts of your course where you might just be explaining things. Or you might want to ask students to read through text or an article. If students simply listen or read, not a lot of information will be retained. It is much better to provide students with a few questions to focus on and to think through while or after they hear about a new topic. These questions should be connected to the main points you want your students to take away.

**Goals:**
- Direct attention to the most important points of the topic
- Increase retention
- Think through and further process the material

**Examples:**
- Write down 3 surprising things you learned in this lecture
- While listening to this section, write down one technique that you can immediately apply in your life and describe how you will apply it
- Pay attention to the 5 best practices described in this lecture. What are they? Describe them in 1-2 sentences.

**Duration:**
10 – 30min

**Materials needed:**
Questions to pay attention to while reading or listening

**How to give feedback:**
- Have students post their takeaways to the discussion board for peer-feedback
- Address the task or questions in next lecture and provide a quick review of your takeaways
- If you notice students are having trouble with the task or focusing on trivial things, you might rethink how you can better highlight important information in your content

**Good for:** Solution-base course, thought-based course
Tutorial Tours

Tutorial Tours are a way for you to guide students through an activity, especially when they are beginner. You can show students how to use a new tool, how to navigate through a platform, or how to solve a problem. Or you can guide your students through exercises or a project. With a tutorial you are walking students through an entire experience so that they gain the confidence to complete an activity on their own in the future.

Goal:
- Increase student confidence when they are new to a topic
- Provide a full, guided walkthrough of a solution

Examples:
- Yoga course: Guide students through a yoga session
- Home automation course: Help students set up their home automation system
- Crochet course: Students follow along as you crochet a hat
- Programming course: Students follow along as you build a website
- Cooking course: Guide students through baking brownies

Time Needed: varies

Materials Needed:
- Screencasts are a good option to use, especially for tech courses.
- Talking head videos will be helpful for sport and crafting courses

How to give feedback:
- Anticipate and address the common pitfalls a novice learner might make.
- Message to students that they have the knowledge and ability to complete more rigorous, independent activities in the future.

Good for: Experienced-based course

Worksheet

Worksheets can take a huge variety of forms; they are an excellent way to motivate students to do a more in-depth activity or showcase their thought process in a more concrete way. Worksheets are a great idea for activities with multiple steps and for longer written reflection activities. Make sure you tell students to print out their worksheets!

Goal:
- Complete a more complex, multi-step activity
- Have a concrete product reflecting students’ thinking

Time Needed: 5-15 minutes

Materials Needed:
- Worksheet--attached as a pdf resource.
- Answer key (if applicable)--attached as a pdf resource.
How to give feedback: Attaching the answer key and the worksheet as separate documents encourages students to complete the worksheet first—without peeking at any answers! For activities that involve fewer correct or incorrect activities, you can provide some sample answers if appropriate, or you can message the types of feelings or emotions students might have surfaced from completing a more reflection-oriented activity.

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course

Activities to reflect on what was learned:

Learning Diary

Students write about their learning progress after every session (the entry shouldn’t be made later than a day after the session). Typically students should write about half a page. They should summarize what they’ve learned and add personal experiences or thoughts on the topic and how they want to apply what they’ve learned in their own life. They should also note if they still have open questions regarding the covered topic. They can also reflect on the progress they’re making and if they’ve had any difficulties with their studying (e.g. finding quiet time) and think of ideas to change that.

Goals:
- Keep track of progress
- Reflect on learning
- Have quickly accessible documentation/takeaway from course
- Improve retention of learned material

Duration:
~15min, ongoing

Materials needed:
Maybe an empty doc or calendar to use for the entries

How to give feedback:
- Ask your students to share 3–5 of the diary entries
- Reply to their posts
- Encourage other students to reply, too
- There are no right or wrong answers in reflection activities, so feedback is more encouragement than anything else

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course
Learning Log

Writing provides a learner the opportunity to communicate what they know through their own words. It is a complex process that connects what you are thinking and makes it concrete, words on paper. It helps you review what you know and elevate questions that can deepen the learning cycle. By responding to thought-activating questions, a learner is encouraged to express creativity and it is essential for self-evaluation of learning. A common misconception is that learning should be focused only the skills being acquired; rather, writing about what you are learning expands how you recall and apply what you have learned.

Goal:
- Reflect on what you know by responding to higher level thinking reflection questions
- Reveal questions you still have through guided questions

Time Needed: 5–10 minutes
Students will write for as long as they want but this time range is more for you to consider when designing a few questions for each practice exercise. If 1 question is pretty deep and a student could easily write for about 10 minutes, that should be sufficient. If 1 question is low-level thinking and might take 1–2 minutes to respond to, add 1–2 questions that would deepen the level of thinking and provide more time for reflection.

Materials Needed:
- A few higher level thinking questions
- PDF with questions, space for someone to type or lines showing the students the space is meant for them to write

How to give feedback:
- As the instructor, anticipate common misunderstandings and address those in an instructional video. Once a student has completed a set of reflection questions, follow that practice exercise with an instructional video addressing the most common themes that typically arise.
- If students share their work through a public channel, provide feedback that shows empathy as well as content accuracy.

Good for: Competence-based course, solution-based course, thought-based course