

# Active Learning

## What is active learning?

*“The process of having students engage in some activity that forces them to reflect upon ideas and how they are using those ideas. Requiring students to regularly assess their own degree of understanding and skill at handling concepts or problems in a particular discipline. The attainment of knowledge by participating or contributing. The process of keeping students mentally, and often physically, active in their learning through activities that involve them in gathering information, thinking and problem solving.”<sup>1</sup>*

In other words, it’s a way of making sure that students engage with the material.

## Why is active learning important in good teaching?

There is a vast collection of research that supports the fact that active learning is more effective than lecture alone. Here are just a few of the key points:

- Stand-alone, one-way lectures are a detached method of imparting information. *Active learning connects the students with the material. If everything you have to teach can be said in a lecture, it could just as easily be sent over email as a pdf!*
- Adults learn best by internalizing the information you impart, and working it into their own lives in a way that is genuinely meaningful to them.
- An instructor needs to know that participants are interpreting a lesson in the way it was designed, so that the learning objectives are being met, plus be ready to adapt in a way that is more meaningful to a diverse group of learners. *You can’t read their minds, so activities where participants can apply their new knowledge and make mistakes allows you to make corrections and modify your teaching for each participant!*
- Active learning often supports a “problem-centric” approach to teaching and learning, which can bring a creative energy and renewed interest for both students and faculty.

## Active learning techniques:

There are many active learning techniques. Some take a short amount of time, others longer. Some work best individually and in place; others require small groups or movement. Here is a small sampling:

Individual/Partner Activities	Group Activities
Free Recall (< 2 min)	Jigsaw
Think-Pair-Share (< 10 min)	3-Step Interview
Mind Mapping	Round Table
Quick Case Study (<10 min)	Role Play
Quick Thinks, e.g. “Correct the Error” (<5 min)	Clickers or Other Survey Assessment (< 2 min)

To learn more about active learning, including an overview of these representative techniques, visit the [CTL Teaching Toolkit Active Learning site <http://tinyurl.com/jhsph toolkit/resources/active-learning>](http://tinyurl.com/jhsph toolkit/resources/active-learning).

<sup>1</sup> Collins, J. W., & O'Brien, N. P. (2003). The greenwood dictionary of education Abc-Clio Incorporated Rev. 10/24/16 For more information, see the CTL Teaching Toolkit’s website: