

Four Group Activities That Can Be Used in The Socially/Physically Distanced Classroom

Due to our need for social/physical distancing to reduce the potential spread of the COVID-19 virus, some of our common teaching practices may not be possible. Below, we offer several learning activities that can be effectively used in the socially/physically distanced classroom. These activities are safest for our students when:

- They are working with permanent teams of four. (This will allow them to work as a full team or to pair off).
- There are designated areas for each team to work in a group that adheres to the socially/physically distancing guidelines of the University
- That students wear face coverings throughout the process.
- That students share information, answers, and resources electronically.



01

REVIEW PAIRS GROUP

This strategy encourages deep thinking and cooperative learning.

- Assigned team begin as two pairs, each working with the same set of problems or questions. There are two roles in each group: Thinker and Coach.
- The “Thinker” in the pair reads aloud the first problem/question and thinks aloud as they work on it.
- The “Coach” listens, watches, and coaches. This coaching involves suggestions, encouragement, and questions, but it does not involve doing the work for the partner.
- Partners exchange the roles of Thinker and Coach for each subsequent problem/question.
- After every two problems/questions, the two pairs in the foursome get together to discuss their responses and try to reach consensus about possible answers.

02

QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PAIRS

This activity fosters deep thinking and reflection as well as problem solving skills.

- Students are paired together. Each writes questions (and the answer to each) that only involve retrieval of information already covered, or the questions can involve higher order thinking.
- Next, students trade questions, answer each other’s questions (providing support for their answers), and then compare answers.

03

STOP AND SWITCH

The purpose of this metacognitive technique is to allow students to think beyond and elaborate on what others have shared. It also allows students to then assimilate ideas and summarize.

- The instructor asks students to write down five things they have learned. Students will have two minutes to complete this task.
- Students are then paired and one student talks for 2 more minutes about what he/she has learned. The other student talks for 2 minutes, but is not permitted to repeat anything that has been stated by his/her partner.
- Students then form new pairings and begin the cycle again with the same rules (not repeating what another student has said) but now for only one minute. Do the same for the other partner for one minute (call STOP/SWITCH).
- At the end of both cycles, the instructor asks each pair to take 30 seconds to write one sentence that summarizes what they have learned (collectively). If you wish, have some students share what they have learned.

04

GROUP GRID

The learning activity involves analyzing, classifying, and organizing subject matter.

- The instructor distributes a blank grid electronically to each group. Additionally, students are given uncategorized, scrambled items of information.
- Groups categorize the information in the grid through a designated process (i.e. open discussion, take turns, divide categories within groups).
- The instructor displays the correct version of the grid and groups compare their work, ask questions, and revise.

References

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- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (1998). Active learning: Cooperation in the college classroom. Interaction Book Company, 7208 Cornelia Drive, Edina, MN 55435.