

4 QUICK TIPS FOR MAINTAINING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN A SEMESTER WITHOUT FALL BREAK

Fall 2020 is a unique semester, not just because of the increased amount of online learning, but also because of the changes in the academic calendar. In years past, Fall Break has offered both students and instructors an opportunity to rest and recharge in the middle of the semester. Because of changes to the academic calendar, students and instructors will not have a break until the Thanksgiving holiday.

As you approach mid-October, the usual time for fall break, you may notice that both you and your students are starting to run low on energy. Throughout the semester, but especially in October, consider using the tips below to maintain engagement for students (and yourself!) and keep the classroom energy high.



SWITCH THINGS UP!

Fitness experts agree that switching up workout routines can prevent boredom, help avoid overuse injuries, and reignite excitement about exercising. Similarly, we can apply the same theory to our classroom to **prevent boredom, avoid burnout, and reignite students' excitement** for the learning process.

- **Switch up your class format:** If your class has been meeting asynchronously all semester, consider offering students the option to join you for a discussion session. If your course has been meeting synchronously, consider giving students a day or a week of assignments that they can complete asynchronously to prevent [Zoom fatigue](#). If your class meets face-to-face in a classroom, consider meeting outside for a change of scenery. The weather and changing leaves in mid-October should be ideal for this.
- **Switch up your assignments:** If you traditionally have students do a lot of writing for homework or in-class assignments, ask them to submit video responses. If you usually assign readings for homework, consider using a Ted Talk or other video for them to watch instead of reading.



HAVE SOME FUN!

Have students play a game to add some fun (and friendly competition) into the class. **Games help reinforce concepts students have learned**, and they can be especially useful midsemester to review before a midterm exam or reinforce concepts with which students struggled on the midterm.

One way to infuse gaming into both online and face-to-face courses is by creating a digital escape room with Google Forms. For help with how to set one up, check out [this blog](#).



FIND WAYS TO TAKE A BREAK!

To continue with our exercise analogy, [experts also agree](#) that taking rest days are essential to building strength and avoiding injury, so if we apply this theory to higher education, **breaks can deepen learning and avoid burnout.**

While we may not have a fall break, consider structuring your syllabus so that students can go a class or two without any homework assignments in the middle of the semester. Not only will this give your students a break, it will also give you a break from grading. Since students won't be doing homework, you may also consider taking a break from introducing new material in class.

It's an **ideal time to reflect and review what students have learned so far.**



PAUSE FOR REFLECTION!

It's important to **check in with students regularly**, and that will become even more important as we approach mid-October. Consider taking an entire class period in mid-October to reflect with students.

[This resource](#) has ideas for different exercises that help students reflect on their learning experience, and [this resource](#) provides a set of questions to help students specifically reflect on their online learning experience. These reflective conversations and activities can also help shape the way you move forward with the rest of the semester.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more *Teaching During COVID-19* resources, check out TLI's website:
https://teaching.utk.edu/teaching_covid19_resources/