



Assessment Field Notes

Resource for Teaching

Inquire: Engaging Students in High-Enrollment Classes

Below you will find tips on different approaches you can take to improve student engagement in high-enrollment classes. Most of them are designed to shift the learning method from one of individualized, passive learning to more interactive, participatory learning that still works with big groups.

Set the tone

First, tell students what you expect of them related to engagement and participation. Many students expect to be lectured at, not participate as part of large-enrollment courses; you can communicate to them that your expectations are different from this norm. Inform students that lectures may not solely focus on a one-way conveying of factual information, and that they should arrive prepared to analyze and discuss the out-of-class readings, problem sets, etc.

If students are aware of your expectations for what good participation in class looks like, they are likely to be more confident about participating. When students don't understand expectations, they can become uncomfortable and may complain. It's likely not because they

are not learning; it's because they don't understand how the learning is happening - and thus might not think they are. If you acknowledge the discomfort of having to participate in a new way, and normalize the discomfort, students will feel more secure.

Once you have told your students how you expect them to participate in the course (for example, what would good participation look like in the context of your plans for engaging them?), build in frequent opportunities for them to engage with you, the topic, and their classmates in ways consistent with the context you set up.

Ways to change your routine

- Present problems or short-answer questions, and give students time to work with one or two others to solve the problem / formulate a response to the question. Ask each group to write their answer / response on a 3X5 card, which they'll turn in to the TA(s). Invite groups to share their answers. Use this time to identify and correct misconceptions, and challenge students' thinking.
- During the first five minutes of class, ask students to predict three to five topics that will be included in the upcoming lecture/discussion and write them down individually. Invite a few students to share their predictions, and write them on the board. Midway through the discussion, ask students to review and revise their predictions as necessary. At the end of the class, ask students to revisit their predictions a final time to see if they were right.

Regardless of what specific tools you use in class, making your expectations explicit regarding the kind of participation you want is an important first step for cuing students to engage more or differently. Use your personality, comfort level, and prior knowledge of your students to decide which tools will work for you. Have fun!

- Leave blanks on your presentation slides for concepts that students should be familiar with that you'd like to reinforce or revisit. As you reach them, give students time to develop answers, and then explain their reasoning to the two or three people sitting closest. Before you fill in the blanks, ask if anyone wants to change their answers. (Use a tablet or an overhead document camera to fill in the blanks; or animate slides to "reveal" filled in blanks.)

Call on students by name

On the first day, pass out manila file folders and thick magic markers. Have the students write their names VERY LARGE on the front (big enough so you can read it from 20-50 feet away). Ask them to bring the folders to each class meeting, or turn them in to the TA, who can alphabetize before/after each class. Instead of raising her/his hand, s/he raises the folder and then speaks. This helps combat the anonymity of being in a large class and gives you a way to call the students by name (which can work wonders for engagement!).

Ways to change their routines

- Linking lecture and discussion by encouraging peer relationships: Ask students to sit with other students from their discussion section. Such an arrangement can increase willingness to engage with people with whom they are already familiar. This strategy also reinforces the importance of the discussion section, and emphasizes the connectedness of the lecture and discussion.
- Listening engagement and comprehension practice: As you begin the lecture, ask students to listen without taking notes. Lecture for 10-15 minutes, and then give students 5 minutes to write down the significant points they remember. Afterward, have them discuss those points with a partner or small groups so students can confirm their memory of the important points.
- Peer teaching and learning: Every 20 minutes, ask students to write down one question about the most recent portion of the lecture on a 3X5 card. Have them pass the cards to a classmate (e.g., three people to the left), and then ask volunteers to provide answers to the question on the card they received.
- “Think-Pair-Share:” Pose a question to the class, and then invite students to vote (show of hands or clickers) for “the right answer.” Ask them to turn to the person sitting in the next seat to compare / contrast answers. After 5 minutes, ask students to vote again. Use the final vote to identify and correct misconceptions, and challenge students’ thinking.