

# Preparing to Teach in an Active Learning Classroom: A Checklist for Success

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**Instructions:** Utilize this checklist to identify recommendations and resources that will help to prepare you for increased teaching effectiveness and enhanced student academic success in the Active Learning Classroom (ALC).

## 12 – 6 Months Before

- ❑ Prepare to think seriously and creatively about changing the manner in which you currently deliver your course to not only navigate the challenges of teaching in a decentered space, but also to take advantage of the features of the room to better realize the benefits of active learning (Cotner, Loper, Walker, & Brooks, 2013)
- ❑ Apply for course release, if available, and/or plan time to design or redesign your course for the ALC.
- ❑ Request a graduate assistant or student assistant, if available/appropriate.
- ❑ Participate in professional development focused on teaching and learning strategies effective in the ALC. Please see below for suggested topics to enhance student success in the ALC.
  - ❖ Active learning strategies
  - ❖ Case Study Method
  - ❖ Classroom feedback and assessment techniques
  - ❖ Cooperative or collaborative learning strategies
  - ❖ Designing effective multiple choice tests
  - ❖ Designing, managing, and assessing long-term, collaborative team projects
  - ❖ Developing high-impact learning activities for work inside-of-class and outside-of-class
  - ❖ Developing positive student-faculty rapport
  - ❖ Developing timely and relevant feedback and assessment strategies
  - ❖ Effective use of technological learning tools
  - ❖ Identifying and implementing technology learning tools
  - ❖ Flipping the ALC
  - ❖ Instructional design best practices for designing or redesigning your course for the ALC
  - ❖ Integrating individual and group accountability with Instant Feedback Assessment Techniques (e.g., IF-AT forms or iClickers)
  - ❖ Interactive discussion strategies
  - ❖ Preparing students to engage, participate, and learn in the ALC
  - ❖ Presentation strategies that engage learners
  - ❖ Problem-based learning
  - ❖ Process-Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL)
  - ❖ Teaching in large classrooms
  - ❖ Teaching in the Active Learning Classroom
  - ❖ Team-based learning

### 12 – 6 Months Before (continued)

- ☐ To learn more about upcoming workshops or conferences on teaching and learning, visit
  - The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, CMU: <https://cetl.cmich.edu/>
- ☐ Visit the ALC to familiarize yourself with the physical space, instructor podium, and technology.
- ☐ Participate in professional development focused on the use and implementation of technology in the ALC.
  - Blackboard/Learning Management System (student rosters, announcements, discussion board, quizzes, rubrics, grading, collaborate, etc.)
  - Classroom technology (podium, visualizer/document camera, cameras, mediated student tables, displaying student content, DVD/Blu Ray player, etc.)
- ☐ Learn from your peers
  - Talk to your CMU colleagues and schedule a time to observe a class in session in the ALC. Follow-up with a conversation about lessons learned with your CMU colleague(s).
  - SCALE-UP, North Carolina State University, Frequently Asked Questions: <http://scaleup.ncsu.edu/FAQs.html>
  - Active Learning Classroom, University of Minnesota: <http://www.classroom.umn.edu/projects/alc.html>

### 6 – 3 Months Before

- ☐ Design or refine your course. To promote student academic success in the ALC, it is important to review instructional design recommendations to ensure an effective alignment between the course student learning objectives, teaching and learning activities, and the course assessments. To learn more, visit:
  - Designing Effective and Innovative Courses: <http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/coursedesign/tutorial/index.html> (A tutorial developed by Carleton College.)
- ☐ Once you have completed the design or redesign of your course, then develop your syllabus. To prepare students for the ALC, include the following:
  - Methods of instruction (“unpack” the rationale for specific teaching strategies such as the flipped classroom and/or expectations for active and collaborative learning - answer the students’ question: “What’s in this for me?”)

### *6 – 3 Months Before (continued)*

- Guidelines for behavior and participation (use of electronic devices, contributing to a team/group, large-class etiquette, use of recording devices, use of classroom technology, etc.)
  - Use of Blackboard (e.g., if flipping your classroom and/or for quizzes, tests, announcements)
  - Use of Chipcast/Panopto systems to deliver audio and/or video content
- ☐ If applicable, meet with Graduate Teaching Assistants to overview expectations, preferences for communication, and responsibilities.

### **3 – 1 Month Before**

- ☐ The classroom architecture may be frustrating at first. Be prepared for some anxiety due to the fact that there is not a well-identified “stage” from which to deliver a lecture. Also, if you are teaching in DOW 135, be aware that some students will not be able to see you due to the height of some of the monitor walls. In addition, half of the students may be facing away from you. Be prepared for some adjustment to the level of noise as you implement active and collaborative group activities. These interactions may be difficult to manage at first. Further, the technologies utilized in the room may create a steep learning curve – be patient with yourself. (Cotner, Loper, Walker, & Brooks, 2013)
- ☐ Practice using and transitioning between all of the classroom technology (Crestron/podium, visualizer/document camera, cameras, mediated student stations, Clickers, etc.)
- ☐ Practice using a microphone and moving around in the room to get used to the physical space and size. Check to see how the table “call lights” work and how you need to move about the room to notice the call lights have been turned on.
- ☐ Practice using the document camera or tablet to solve problems or write notes. Check to make sure your writing is legible.
- ☐ Practice transitioning between instructor content and displaying student content. Be familiar with the table numbering system.
- ☐ Know how to obtain technology support.

### **First Day**

- ☐ Consider your first-day attire. If you will be using a microphone, select attire that will easily allow you to clip a microphone to it.
- ☐ Introduce yourself effectively by sharing your interests in this course, qualifications, philosophy of teaching, current research projects, preferences about communication, and a bit about your personal interests or hobbies.
- ☐ Orient students to the ALC by explaining to students why you are utilizing specific approaches to teaching and learning and emphasize how these approaches will benefit them. (Expect some resistance.)

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## *First Day (continued)*

- ❑ Create buy-in for approaches and learning objectives by helping students see the connections to future coursework, employer needs, and their professional goals.
  - Getting Started:  
<http://www4.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/Columns/Getstart.html> (This article by Richard Felder offers a variety of tips for the first day, including activities that motivate the students' interest in the course.)
  - If flipping your course, visit "[Three Critical Conversations Started and Sustained by Flipped Learning](http://www1.facultyfocus.com/eletter/profile/1/216.html?ET=facultyfocus:e216:182951a:&st=email)" at  
<http://www1.facultyfocus.com/eletter/profile/1/216.html?ET=facultyfocus:e216:182951a:&st=email> (This article highlights the importance of inviting student questions and offers specific responses.)
  - Share employer priorities with students by summarizing the key findings of "It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success" (<http://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/it-takes-more-major-employer-priorities-college-learning-and>) by the Hart Research Associates and discuss how the assignments and activities in this course will prepare students to meet employer needs and interests.
- ❑ Orient students to expectations for engagement and participation inside and outside of the ALC by engaging students in a short, active and collaborative activity that gets them excited about the course content.
- ❑ Communicate (or collaboratively develop) expectations for behavior (getting attention, collecting and distributing handouts, testing, team behaviors, etc.)
- ❑ Overview course requirements and recommendations for success.
- ❑ Administer a pre-test to assess students' prior knowledge of essential course concepts. This could be combined with a student interest survey to help you get to know your students' and their interests and professional goals.
- ❑ Encourage students to introduce themselves when speaking to promote a positive classroom environment.
- ❑ Review and revise, if needed, classroom management strategies for collecting and distributing handouts, activity instructions, group assessments, tests, etc.
- ❑ Review and revise, if needed, strategies for providing instructions to collaborative groups, getting students' attention, and managing transition time between activities.

## First Week

- ❑ Use large gestures and move around the room to capture and keep student attention and engagement.
- ❑ Engage students in low-risk icebreakers and/or low-stakes activities that help them to create connections to you, their peers, the content, and the technology.
  - Visit “32 Icebreaker Activities, developed by Lansing Community College, at 32 Icebreaker Activities (Lansing Community College): <http://www.lcc.edu/cte/resources/teachingettes/icebreakers.aspx> for ideas.
- ❑ Ask students to practice using the whiteboards, connecting to the table monitor, displaying course-related content, and using the microphone.
- ❑ If you will be using clickers, be sure to use ask students to register them and be sure to integrate the use of clickers regularly throughout your course.
- ❑ Encourage students to move their chairs so that they can see you, their peers, content, etc., as applicable.

## First Week to Mid-Semester

- ❑ Continue to emphasize “why” you are asking students to engage in specific activities and/or collaborative work and explain how these activities support the learning objectives for the course.
- ❑ Monitor active and collaborative work to ensure engagement and progress toward learning goals. If necessary, revisit the formation of collaborative groups/teams and the assignment of roles/responsibilities.
  - For strategies to effectively respond to common group challenges, check out “*Collaborative Learning Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*” by Barkley, Cross and Major (2005).
- ❑ Vary instructional strategies to accommodate student learning preferences and to increase student engagement and motivation.
- ❑ Utilize quick, classroom assessment techniques to inform teaching effectiveness and student learning.
  - Strategies to Check Student Learning in the Classroom, Iowa State University: <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/teaching-resources/classroom-practice/teaching-techniques-strategies/check-student-learning/> (This website overviews a variety of easy-to-implement classroom assessment techniques.)
- ❑ Between weeks 3 – 8, after students have received a grade and understand their progress in the course, consider collecting midsemester feedback.
  - To administer yourself:
    - Develop a poll in Blackboard or Survey Monkey that asks students specific questions related to their learning experience (e.g., What is helping you learn in this class? What suggestions do you have to further your learning? “What do you want to continue doing in this class? What do you want to stop doing in this class?)

### *First Week to Mid-Semester (continued)*

- Invite CETL to administer for you:
  - Contact CETL at 774.3615 to schedule a confidential consultation and midsemester feedback session. Mid (or before) semester feedback sessions are available so that instructors may gain invaluable and timely student input that informs teaching and student learning. A trained CETL consultant works with students via confidential focus groups. Student feedback is then summarized and shared with the instructor.

### **Mid-Semester to the End of Course**

- ❑ Continue to vary instructional strategies to accommodate student learning preference and to increase student engagement and motivation. Even modest variations to traditional strategies help to create interest and engagement (e.g., instead of a think-pair-share activity, ask students to think-draw-pair-share).
- ❑ Continue to conduct classroom assessments to inform teaching and student progress toward the learning objectives.

### **Last Day**

- ❑ Administer a post-assessment. If applicable, share the results with students and ask them to compare their pre-test and post-test results and identify learning gains.
- ❑ End on a positive note by reviewing key concepts or ideas. Visit the links below for specific recommendations:
  - [End on a High Note: Better Endings for Classes and Courses:](http://home.capecod.net/~tpanitz/tedsarticles/endingcourses.htm)  
<http://home.capecod.net/~tpanitz/tedsarticles/endingcourses.htm>
  - [The Last Day of Class;](http://teaching.berkeley.edu/last-day-class) <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/last-day-class>

#### **References:**

Cotner, S., Loper, J., Walker, J.D., & Brooks, D.C. (2013). "It's not you, it's the room" – Are the high-tech, active learning classrooms worth it? *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 42(6), 82-88