

Discussion Techniques

Selections from Barkley, Elizabeth. 2010. *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. Jossey-Bass.
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Goal	Engagement Techniques
Knowledge, skills, recall, understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background knowledge probe – 2-3 open-ended questions that probe existing understandings. Answers may be simply collected or shared to begin dialogue about misunderstandings. • Artifacts – Use objects or images with questions to explore student thoughts about a specific concept or question. • Reading Notes – Assign students words, phrases, or concepts to focus their reading and note taking, possibly with worksheets. Notes can be collected or the basis of discussion with a peer. • Quotes – Select 5-6 different passages from a text and put them on multiple slips of paper in a container. Each student draws a slip of paper, takes a few minutes to think about what they want to say in response to their passage, and then each quote can be discussed in turn. • Team Jeopardy – Play Jeopardy with students by creating a set of topical categories related to the subject matter and questions/answers of varying difficulty that can be put into a table grid. Divide the class into teams of 5-6 students each, distribute rules and directions, decide who goes first and play.
Analysis and critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify – identify a category of information that’s important to understand and have the students brainstorm the principles of that category, possibly in relation to questions, topics, artifacts. • Believing and Doubting – Students are asked to be “believers” and read a text empathetically, making conscious effort to understand the author’s perspective and values, listing arguments to support the author’s views. Students are then asked to be “doubters” rereading the text for weaknesses, listing objections. • Academic controversy – Student partners review material on a controversial topic and brainstorm arguments to support their assigned position. Pairs then split up and move around the room, talking to other students on the same side to strengthen their position. In quads, pairs present their arguments, then switch sides and argue the opposite side. Then they work together to come to a consensus position. • Split-room debate – After presentation of a controversial topic or case, students are assigned to one side of the room based on their given position on the issue. Students then alternate stating their positions and responding to their opponents. Students, not the teacher, select who on the other side speaks next. • Analytic Teams – Break students into groups with several roles each – summarizer, connector, proponent, example giver, questioner, critic – and have each group discuss a specific topic. Each group member should stay within their role and present back to the entire class on their discussion topic.
Synthesis and creative thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team concept maps – Student teams draw a diagram that conveys their ideas or understandings of a complex concept, procedure, or process. Diagrams typically look like flow charts with words or phrases connected in complex ways, and are best fashioned after brainstorming concepts and procedures, and choosing graphic methods to illustrate them. • Variations – Challenge students to rewrite the end of a story, imagine the consequences of a change in history, use an image for a new work of art, etcetera. • Letters – Have students assume the identity of an important person in a discipline and write a letter explaining their thoughts on an issue or controversy. • Role Play – Assign students specific but complex roles in a scenario with multiple stakeholders and perspectives. They should have real world complexities, have a problem to which they must respond, a possible debate to have, or a collaborative decision to make by the group. Play the role play but make sure to have time after to discuss the lessons learned. • Poster sessions – Students can make posters to demonstrate their concepts about a specific complex issue.
Problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s the problem? – Help students identify a problem by giving them two or more types of problems that are difficult to distinguish, with several examples of each type. In groups have them identify which example fits which kind of problem and discuss their thinking when finished. • Think Again! – Present students with a common misconception in the discipline and then given them a poll asking them to agree or disagree. Then tell students the statement is untrue and ask them to prove why it is untrue. • Think-aloud-pair-problem solving – Give student pairs a series of problems and have each member

	<p>of the pair alternate between being the problem solver and listener. The problem solver thinks aloud, talking through the problem, while the partner listens, following the steps and attempting to understand the reasoning, offering suggestions if there are missteps.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proclamations – Have students identify and analyze a problematic situation in the local or national community, then write a speech for a government official that persuades others of the urgency of the problem and strategies for solving it. Then discuss different takes on the problem and solution. • Send-a-problem – Groups of students each receive a problem, try to solve it, then pass the problem and solution to the next group. Without looking at the previous group’s solution, the next group works to solve the problem. After as many passes as seem useful, groups analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the responses to the problem. • Case studies – Create an in-depth, real-world scenario or situation that students must read about and analyze as an example of a concept discussed in class. Cases may involve unresolved problematic situations in need of solutions where students identify with the roles of decision makers and stakeholders in the situation.
Application and performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemporary issues journal – Have students keep a journal relating in-class issues and readings to contemporary events or personal experiences. Use the journal for individual student assessment or discussion. • Directed paraphrase – Ask students to rephrase important passages or concepts in their own words, possibly designed for a specific lay audience. • Insights-resources-application – Ask students to complete a written assignment that includes discussion of 1) new understandings (insights), 2) resources that amplify or make sense of the reading (resources), and 3) an example from the student’s personal experience that relates (application). These can be short essays that can help begin discussion. • Jigsaw – Break of class into several small groups that will work to develop expertise together on a specific concept. Then reassign each student to new groups with the other experts and have them teach the concepts to their peers. • Field trips – Visit an off-campus location for first-hand observation, possibly with outside experts to help inform students. This should require some preparation, especially if it involves interacting with others in a knowledgeable and ethical manner.
Attitudes and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autobiographical reflections – Ask students to write short or long essays reflecting on their own personal experiences with a specific course-related topic or question. This can surface misunderstandings, expertise, biases, insights.... • Dyadic interviews – Student pairs take turns interviewing each other, asking questions that address individual values, attitudes, beliefs, and prior experiences as they relate to course content or learning goals. Interview questions should be designed by the instructor to relate clearly to the course themes. • Circular response – Students sit in circle and take turns expressing their thoughts in response to an instructor-designated prompt, and make a brief summary of the preceding speaker’s comments. • Ethical dilemmas – Students are presented with a real-world, ethics-based scenario related to a course topic to which a solution needs to be designed. Students then submit anonymously their own decisions of the correct path to the instructor, who then culls and uses the responses to address common challenges. • Connected communities – Students in different courses come together to discuss instructor-developed prompts, exposing students to a wider range of views. • Stand where you stand – Students read two opposing articles on a controversial issue. In class, the instructor reads a statement supporting one argument and students stand in an area of the class associated with their position: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Students then articulate their rationales and students are invited to change positions if they feel persuaded.
Learning and study skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource scavenger hunt – Students engage in fact-finding and information-processing exercises using instructor-specified library and internet resources. • Formative quiz • Crib cards – Ask students challenging questions and then allow them the opportunity to develop study resources for them, including index cards with essential information. • Student-generated rubrics – Provide students with examples of varying qualities of student work and have them generate criteria for grading and gradations of quality within each criterion. • Triad listening – Have students in groups of three occupy roles of speakers, reflective listeners, and referees (who oversee the exchange and do not interrupt except for factual clarification). Speakers speak first, then roles rotate.