

# Instructional Strategies to Increase Student Engagement

## Warm-Up/Do Now

**KWL List:** Set a timer for 5 minutes and have students list everything they know about the topic on sticky notes. Immediately after, or later in class, have students read off each of their sticky notes and group them into categories on the board or on chart paper. (see also: *KWL graphic organizer*)

**Assumption Smashing:** List several or all assumptions related to a topic. Set a timer for 8 minutes and have students write about what would happen if one was changed. (For example, "All forms of transportation are now free." What would be the effect on society? Or, "You can now divide by zero." What would that change in math?)

**Authentic Questions:** Set a timer for 5 minutes and have students write down on strips of paper questions related to the content. ("Why do we need to have fractions?" "What would happen if we tried to stop a volcano from erupting?") Collect the question strips and tape/paste them to a larger piece of paper. Answer several per day during the unit by writing on the paper and quickly summarizing the question and answer to the class. Students may wish to take on answering some questions as well, perhaps for extra credit.

**Free Writing:** Post a topic on the board. Set a timer for 5 minutes and have students write everything they can think of about the topic. The rules are that students must not stop writing, even if they "run out of things to say," and they may not do any editing or criticism during the writing. After the time is up, students can either read the writing aloud in a small group (3-4 students), or be assigned to scan what they have written and pull out ideas or phrases they can use for the next activity.

**Jumbled Summary:** On paper or an overhead transparency, present randomly ordered key words and phrases from a lesson. Set a timer for 8 minutes and have students put the terms and phrases in a logical order to show understanding of the lesson concept. (Examples: steps in solving an equation, actual math steps, events in a timeline, events in a plot sequence, stages in a cycle)

**4-Square Draw:** Set a timer for 10 minutes and have students draw 4 squares on a piece of paper. Post a topic and ask them to quickly sketch four different illustrations of a concept. (Example: draw 4 different archetypes, draw 4 different ways to look at a cube, draw 4 different scenes from the rising action of the story, draw 4 properties of graphite)

**Random Item Challenge:** Select a household object and place it on a table or the chalkboard rail. Place an item from the unit beside it or write a topic, concept, or character on the board. Set a timer for 8 minutes and ask students to make a t-chart with the headings of "similarities" and "differences." Ask them to list as many similarities and differences as they can. (Example: Write *Dally*, a character from The Outsiders, on the board and place a toaster on the chair. Similarities: Both heat up, both can have a "frayed cord," both will short out when they get into "hot water," both could help you get breakfast if you were really hungry, neither are fancy or particularly respected. Differences: a toaster doesn't move around, a toaster doesn't make bad decisions, people keep toasters practically forever and Dally doesn't really have a home.)

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## Introduction/Direct Instruction

**Anticipation Guide:** Work with entire class to complete a K-W-L graphic organizer to prepare students for a new instructional topic. Complete on overhead or large paper as students complete on their own paper.

**10 + 2:** Set a timer for 10 minutes and present new information. Set the timer for 2-4 minutes, and have students think-pair-share or think-pair-draw for 2-4 minutes. Circulate during this time to answer questions and redirect. Repeat the cycle throughout lesson. (Can also be 5+1)

**TRIP:** Have students write T-R-I-P down the side of a piece of paper and move to sit in pairs. Write on overhead or board: “Write down the chapter/unit/lesson/story’s Title, Relationships of pictures to text, Intent of questions related to the story, and Perspective what you believe the focus of the story will be.” Set a timer for 10-14 minutes. (Note: You may have to write on the board the page numbers for the start and end of the text on which you are focusing.)

**Acronym Memory Method:** Present information that must be memorized as an acronym and have teams of students do a “wave” (each student stands up to say a part). Alternately, list the parts and have students work with the teacher to devise a mnemonic.

**Finding Clues in a Picture:** Write several leading questions on the board or overhead. Set a timer for 4 minutes. Ask students to move into pairs and find clues about the upcoming reading by analyzing a picture in the reading and considering the questions on the board.

**Guided Questioning for Reading:** Read a passage aloud, and begin asking basic questions about what might happen next. Stop every few paragraphs and ask more prediction and synthesis questions. As comprehension improves, make questions less supportive and more challenging.

**Guided Questioning for Video Segments:** Begin asking basic questions about what happened and might happen next based on opening credits/scene. Stop every few minutes and ask more prediction and synthesis questions. As comprehension improves, make questions less supportive and more challenging. (Example: When showing a Standard Deviants Algebra video clip, pause after the introduction to X-Y pairs, randomly select names from the gradebook, and have 2 students quickly re-enact the skit they saw on the video, then ask volunteers how they would act out X-Y pairs if they had to film it.)

**Agree/Disagree Matrix:** Ask students whether they agree with a statement about an instructional topic that they will be introduced to during class. Have a “pollster” who sits near a wall record the statement and the groups’ responses in a matrix. Refer back to the pollster on a regular basis throughout the year and have them “update” the matrix over time using different color ink.

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**Agreement Circles:** Have students stand in a circle, facing each other, as the teacher makes a statement. Students who agree with the statement step into the circle. Continue making more restrictive or expansive statements until all students are in the circle.

**4 Corners/Your Choice:** Place a small number of choices (usually 4) in the corners of the classroom. Read and point to all the choices. Give students 60 seconds to stand next to their choice. Students selecting the same choice then discuss reasons or advantages and disadvantages of their choice. (Example: Which is the best way to...? What is the biggest problem..? What is the best next step..?) *Note:* Avoid highly-charged moral topics and right-or-wrong choices.

**Prediction Raffle:** Have students write a prediction of how something will turn out on a slip of paper and enter the paper into a “raffle” for something (example: student can select among small piece of candy, opportunity to sit in the teacher’s chair for a day, chance to run an activity or write on the overhead). Draw for the prize when the class determines the answer. First correct prediction that is drawn is a winner.

**Teacher Demonstration:** Show students how things work or how things happen. Involve students in the demonstration by having them predict and/or explain each step (see 4 Corners, Agree/Disagree Matrix, Prediction Raffle). You might ask them draw step-by-step directions during the demonstration on a storyboard.

**Student Discovery:** Provide individual, pairs, or small groups of students with a question, process, or problem and the materials to explore it.

**Find Someone Who:** Provide a “bingo” card with skills or questions in each square related to the current unit. Set a timer for 10-14 minutes and have students seek out the peers in the class who know the answers to specific content questions. (If you know that several students have a significant lack of content knowledge, set them up the previous day to be experts by giving them one or more answers without any other students being aware of it!)

**Quick Talk:** Students are placed in pairs and given 30 seconds to share all they know about a topic.

**Jack Kerouac Quick Talk:** Student teams of 3-4 prepare to speak in front of the class for 60 seconds to share all they know about a topic WITHOUT STOPPING; when one stops, the next one must start! (Fun energizer; have all teams prepare but only have 1-2 teams perform each time.)

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## Practice

**Acting Out:** Students can act out mathematical, scientific, or social problems to improve their comprehension. For example, to represent the math equation  $4 + 2$ , have four students stand in one area and two students stand in another area. Physically have the students move together to show that the two groups are joining or being added together to form a group of six students. Students can also act out roles from stories or historical events. (Note: you can find a grading rubric for this by Googling “presentation rubric.”)

**Action Projects:** A project where ideas learned through research are tested and applied in a real- world situation. For example, students may use the knowledge of democracy learned in a Civics class to poll neighbors or students about candidates in an upcoming election.

**Air Drawing:** Students draw or motion in the air to demonstrate how they will carry out a procedure before they actually do so.

**Analyzing Perspectives:** Students evaluate a problem or topic from various perspectives.

**Biopoem:** This activity allows students to write poems about any specific person or object (character in book, living or inanimate objects) as a means to summarize their knowledge of a topic.

**Brochure:** Students create a brochure to explain the topic to others.

**Commercial:** Students create a commercial to explain the topic to others.

**Bulletin Boards:** Place students in groups to create a bulletin board or wall space to inform, engage, guide, or motivate others about a topic or concept.

**Capsule Vocabulary:** After orally and visually presenting key terminology for a particular topic, pair students and set the timer for 15 minutes. Student pairs try to incorporate as many terms as possible into a one-page essay about the topic.

**Class Publication:** Assign students to collaborate to create a written work to be published about a particular topic. Formats might include: magazine, newspaper, brochure, map, or newsletter. (Note: Does not have to be created on the computer; student pieces can be handwritten or drawn and reduced on the copier to make a handwritten collage of the various products.)

**Collages:** Students gather images (clippings from magazines, photographs, or their own drawings) and organize them to illustrate a concept or point of view.

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**Competitions:** Competitions can be useful in motivating some students to learn. Team competitions are especially effective in the classroom if they are tied to a collaborative practice or review activity before the competition. Keep games like concentration, Find the Truth, and Pictionary short and focused, lasting 15-30 minutes; games like Jeopardy or question war should last no longer than 40-60 minutes. In a 90-minute class, you should be able to have a warm-up, a game, and at least one other activity.)

**Question War:** Have students divided into 2 groups. For homework or for 20 minutes in class, students write as many review questions and answers as they can on index cards. Collect and check for accuracy. The next day, divide the class into two groups. Explain that there will be a “question war.” Groups take turns asking questions; students rotate as question-asker and question answerer. Students have 30 seconds to answer; they may confer with their teammates but must answer themselves. If a student cannot answer, s/he hears the correct answer and becomes a “prisoner of war.” Prisoners may not participate for 5 minutes; at the end of 5 minutes they are allowed another chance to answer the question and may rejoin their team. Team with most points wins at end; deduct 1 point for each prisoner still in “jail” at the end of the class.

**Computer Games:** Educational computer games can be purchased for students to use to review or explore concepts. Try for games that keep score.

**Debates:** Using agreed-upon rules, students debate a given topic. Keep debates short and focused; make sure all students participate in a short period of time. Both teacher and students complete a debate review form (Note: you can find these by Googling “classroom debate rubric”).

**Deliberations/Devil’s Advocate:** Students are asked to support one point of view on a topic, then take and support opposing point of view. Students then write position papers or draw/create posters to illustrate that perspective.

**Find the Truth:** Groups of students write 3 false statements and 1 true statement on an index card and challenge other teams to “find the truth.”

**The Walls are Clozing In:** Post 4 sets of cloze (fill-in-the-blank) study guides on the walls. Divide the class into 4 teams of students. Provide them with an envelope of cut out vocab words and several glue sticks. Set the timer for 5 minutes and allow the teams to sort through the vocab pieces. Set the timer for 5 minutes and let teams compete to see how many of the vocab words they can get glued in the right places before time is up. Take up the vocab and glue, then review answers with all teams on the overhead while they mark right or wrong on their papers. Team with the most right earns a small prize.

**Idea Spinner:** Create a spinner marked into four quadrants and labeled “Predict, Explain, Summarize, Evaluate.” After new material is presented, have student pairs spin the spinner. Place on the overhead 4 questions that match the “Predict, Explain, Summarize, Evaluate Categories. Student pairs answer the question based on the location of the spinner. (For example, if the spinner lands in the

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"Summarize" quadrant, the question might be: "List the key concepts just presented.") Have students jot answers on a sticky note and present answers by category.

**Inside-Outside Circle:** Place students into two circles (one inside and the other an outside circle). The inside and outside circles of students face each other. Within each pair of facing students, students quiz each other with questions they have written. The outside circle moves to create new pairs and the process is repeated.

**Sort Cards:** Words and images associated with a topic are put on individual cards. Groups sort cards into categories using graphic organizers such as Venn diagrams or t-charts (Note: use "grouping circles" for Venn diagrams).

**Think-Pair-Share:** Pose a question, set timer for 1 minute for students to think individually, and then set timer for 2 minutes to pair together to discuss/answer a question. Ask several pairs share ideas with the class. (**Think-ink-pair-share** is the same process, but have students write a statement in their notebook about the topic and idea(s) that were discussed.)

**Artifact Strategy:** Present carefully selected objects (artifacts) to the students. Pose a problem, orally and in writing. Set a timer for 15 minutes and ask pairs or small groups of students to observe and discuss the objects and write or draw answers to the presented problem. (Example: While reading *Of Mice and Men*, present a house key, a shovel, and stuffed animal to the class. Ask students to write or draw answers to: "How might these objects have changed the outcome of the novel?")

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**Closure** (should be no longer than 2-10 minutes)

**3-2-1:** Ask students to write three key terms from what they have just learned, two ideas they would like to learn more about, and one concept or skill they think they have mastered.

**Agree/Disagree Matrix Review:** Students research the topic or listen to the teacher's presentation of information, and again determine their approval or disapproval to the responses, which are recorded. Small groups or whole class discusses the results and changes.

**Alphabet Summary:** Each student is assigned a different letter of the alphabet and asked to generate a word starting with that letter that is related to the topic being discussed. Students share their terms with the class.

**Application Cards:** At the end of instruction, students write a real world application for the knowledge on a small card and submit the card to the teacher.

**Cheat Notes:** Students prepare a single note card of information they believe will be on a quiz or open notebook test. Students are allowed to use these notes when taking the quiz or test; they can write as small as they want but may not use a computer or photocopier. As students gain confidence, cards are no longer used.

**Grab Bag:** Near the conclusion of a lesson, have a student draw an object from a bag. The student must explain or illustrate how the object is related to what they have learned.

**Ticket Out:** On a small piece of paper, students write responses to teacher questions as summaries of what they have learned or what they do not understand. For example, say and write on the board: "What did you learn today?" or "What questions do you still have?" (Note: if this is kept in a journal, it could be a **Learning Log**.)

**One Word Summary:** Have students select (or invent) one word which best summarizes a topic. Write 2-3 sentences justifying the selection of the summary word.

**Quick Draw:** Students are paired and given a short period (typically 30 seconds) to share all they know, by writing with symbols or drawings, about the daily lesson or unit. Hang these on the wall!

**Relay Summary:** Divide the class into two teams. One team member writes one sentence summarizing reading then passes the page to a teammate. This process continues until everyone on the team has added at least one sentence.