

Active Learning Techniques

50 Minute Library Instruction Activities

- Present the class with an open-ended question as they enter the classroom
 - Examples:
 - “What would you use to find information on your topic? Be as specific as possible”
 - “How do you decide if a source you retrieve is good enough for a college level paper? List three things you look for.”
 - Etc.
 - Have them “brainstorm” on paper letting them know you will be calling on them later.
 - Ask for volunteers and then start pointing if no one responds.
 - Use the answers to start the class presentation by pointing out the strengths of each suggestion and by comparing the answers to what you will be doing in class.

- Pass out short excerpts from a variety of sources and have students rank each as either “Scholarly” or “Popular”
 - After their initial decision, pass out a list of possible citations and have them match the list to the excerpts. Make sure at least one item on the list is from a highly recognizable popular magazine or newspaper.
 - Open discussion of their votes

- Create groups randomly by handing out differently colored cards (5 sets of red, orange, blue, green, etc.) to students as they enter the room. If the cards are also numbered (1-5 for each color for instance), groups can be formed in many different ways.

- After a brief demonstration of a tool, give students a timed exercise with the database. Have them come back in groups to compare retrieved articles by looking at one of any number of criteria such as:
 - Evaluation criteria: Coverage, Authorship, Accuracy, Point of View, Language Level, etc.
 - Assign specific topics so that each group compares different articles retrieved by topic
 - Alternatively, assign different types of sources (e.g. newspapers, transcripts, magazines, etc.) on the same topic and have them compare the information retrieved
 - Assign different databases for each group to search similar topics. Have groups compare the differences between databases of what they retrieved.
 - Any of these can be done using the jigsaw technique but mixing the groups up twice cannot be done in one 50 minute session!

- Provide a problem (or use one suggested by the professor)
 - Break the class into groups and introduce short articles or excerpts about the problem to each group.
 - Have them come up with three things the article informs them about the topic
 - Each group reports back to the class stating what knowledge was gained, and what questions still exist.
 - Have the class decide if all the questions are answered by looking at all the articles
 - PROBLEMS: This is Very Time Consuming to put together
- Have pairs of students work to select one article by using a database specific to the discipline in question and one web site found by searching Google. Provide specific questions related to evaluation and have them decide which source is better for an academic paper. They must provide rationale for each statement.
- Begin students on a search in a specialized database without instruction. Provide a set of questions (different by group). Have each group report back after their experiences to “teach” the class what they learned. (Be cautious with this as some groups have a hard time figuring out the best way to do something and may provide misleading information when they present)
- Begin a class that you are aware have developed topics in hand by asking students to write down what they know already and what they need to find out. For lower level classes it may help to demonstrate such thinking in a large group brainstorming session before asking them to react to their own topics. Students should also be aware of who their audience will be and why that might matter in gathering information.
- Provide a problem and ask students to log their search for information related to that problem: Students must include the sources consulted and the results of those searches. If there is time, they should comment on what they could do differently next time.
- Physically illustrating Boolean (AND, OR, NOT) principles:
 - Have students who are wearing both sneakers and hats stand.
 - Have students who are wearing (sneakers or boots) and hats stand.
 - Which group is bigger? (etc.)
- Have students in each group randomly assigned as Reporters share the discoveries of the group with the class. Provide specific guidelines for the Reporters.
- Provide three questions for each article a student retrieves:
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - Is the language sophisticated and difficult to understand?
 - Is there any information used to back up the author’s points?
 - Etc.
- Have students look through and evaluate print resources. Provide questions to lead discussion.

For Further Reading:

Whitmore, M. P. (Ed.) (1996). *Empowering students; hands-on library instruction activities*. Pittsburgh, PA: Library Instruction Publications.

Whitmore, M. P. (Ed.) (1997). *Unmasking the Internet for research: using hands-on active learning exercises*. Pittsburgh, PA: Library Instruction Publications.

Gradowski, G., Snavelly, L., Dempsey, P. (Eds.) (1998). *Designs for Active Learning: a sourcebook of classroom strategies for information education*. Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries.