# 25 Online Active Learning Techniques

These techniques have multiple benefits: the instructor can easily and quickly assess if students have really mastered the material (and plan to dedicate more time to it, if necessary), and the process of measuring student understanding in many cases is also practice for the material—often students do not actually learn the material until asked to make use of it in assessments such as these. Finally, the very nature of these assessments drives interactivity and brings several benefits. Students are revived from their passivity of merely listening to a lecture and instead become attentive and engaged, two prerequisites for effective learning. These techniques are often perceived as “fun”, yet they are frequently more effective than lectures at enabling student learning.

Not all techniques listed here will have universal appeal, with factors such as your teaching style and personality influencing which choices may be right for you.

*(This list is an abridged version of Kevin Yee’s* [*Interactive Techniques*](https://www.usf.edu/atle/documents/handout-interactive-techniques.pdf)*, CC BY-NC-SA)*

1. **Picture Prompt** – Show students an image with no explanation, and ask them to identify/explain it, and justify their answers. Or ask students to write about it using terms from lecture, or to name the processes and concepts shown. Also works well as group activity. Do not give the “answer” until they have explored all options first.
2. **Why Do You Think That?** – Follow up all student responses (not just the incorrect ones) with a challenge to explain their thinking, which trains students over time to think in discipline-appropriate ways.
3. **Word Cloud Guessing** - Before you introduce a new concept to students, show them a word cloud on that topic, using an online generator (Wordle, Taxedo, or Tagul) to paste a paragraph or longer of related text, and challenge students to guess what the topic was.
4. **Instructor Storytelling** – Instructor illustrates a concept, idea, or principle with a real-life application, model, or case-study.
5. **Reverse Socratic Questioning** – The instructor requires students to ask him/her questions, and the instructor answers in such a way as to goad another question immediately but also drive the next student question in a certain direction.
6. **Empty Outlines** – Distribute a partially completed outline of the lecture and ask students to fill it in. Useful at start or at end of class.
7. **Classroom Opinion Polls** – Informal polling or surveys suffice to test the waters before a controversial subject.
8. **Quote Minus One** – Provide a quote relevant to your topic but leave out a crucial word and ask students to guess what it might be: “I cannot forecast to you the action of \_\_\_\_\_\_; it is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” This engages them quickly in a topic and makes them feel invested.
9. **Everyday Ethical Dilemmas** – Present an abbreviated case study with an ethical dilemma related to the discipline being studied.
10. **Polar Opposites** – Ask the class to examine two written-out versions of a theory (or corollary, law of nature, etc.), where one is incorrect, such as the opposite or a negation of the other. In deciding which is correct, students will have to examine the problem from all angles. (This can also be a good breakout rooms activity online, with each group reporting out on their discussions.)
11. **Pop Culture** – Infuse your lectures, case studies, sample word problems for use during class with current events from the pop culture world. Rather than citing statistics for housing construction, for instance, illustrate the same statistical concept you are teaching by inventing statistics about something students gossip about, like how often a certain pop star appears in public without make-up.
12. **Make Them Guess** – Introduce a new subject by asking an intriguing question, something that few will know the answer to (but should interest all of them). Accept blind guessing for a while before giving the answer to build curiosity. Online, this can posted before the end of the previous week to prompt students on the next week’s content.
13. **Make It Personal** – Design class activities (or even essays) to address the real lives of the individual students. Instead of asking for reflections on Down’s Syndrome, ask for personal stories of neurological problems by a family member or anyone they have ever met.
14. **Read Aloud** – Choose a small text (500 words or less) to read aloud, and ask students to pay particular attention during this phase of lecture. A small text read orally in a larger lecture can focus attention.
15. **Word of the Day** – Select an important term and highlight it throughout the class session, working it into as many concepts as possible. Challenge students to do the same in their interactive activities.
16. **Muddiest Point** – On the discussion forum or as a Question in Lessons, ask for the “most confusing” point from the week’s content.
17. **Focused Listing** – Students list several ideas related to the main focus point (example: list all the possible causes of the Civil War). Helpful for starting new topics, such as a brainstorm.
18. **Haiku** – Students write a haiku (a three-line poem: 5-syllables, then 7, then 5) on a given topic or concept, and then share it with others.
19. **Photo Homework** – Students are assigned to use a smartphone to snap a picture of something at home (or out in the city) that captures a specific concept from the class, as assigned by the teacher.
20. **Board of Artwork** – Post in the Discussion Forum the collected drawings / abstract concepts students turned in for a previous activity and create an opportunity for discussion and debrief.
21. **Time Traveler** – Students video record themselves at the start of the semester answering questions similar to the eventual final exam, then critique it near the end of the term.
22. **Circle the Questions** – Pre-make a handout that has a few dozen likely student questions (make them specific) on your topic for the next week and ask students to circle the ones they don’t know the answers to, then turn in the paper.
23. **Video Selfie** – Ask students to make a video of themselves performing the homework (or lab), as they will take it more seriously and be more likely to avoid mistakes.
24. **Infographic** – Students use online services (canva.com, infogr.am) to create an infographic that combines flowchart logic and visual presentation
25. **PowerPoint Presentations** – Put students into groups of three or four students. Students focus their attention on a chapter or article and present this material to the class using PowerPoint. Have groups conference with you beforehand to outline their presentation strategy and ensure coverage of the material.