

Flipping Large Classes: Three Strategies to Engage Students

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As we continue our [ongoing series](#) focused on the flipped classroom in higher education, it's time to tackle another frequently asked question: "How can I flip a large class?"

I like this question because it's not asking whether you can flip a large class, but rather what's the best way to do it. Faculty who teach large classes are challenged not only by the sheer number of students but also by the physical space in the classroom. Having 100, 200, or 400+ students in class means teaching in large lecture halls with stadium seating and seats that are bolted to the floor. It's not exactly the ideal space for collaboration and group discussions, so the types of flipped and active learning strategies you can use are more limited.

Often, faculty fall back on the "think, pair, share" format or use clicker questions to encourage student engagement. But there are other techniques we can deploy in these large classrooms to engage students and involve them in higher levels of critical thinking and analysis.

To start the conversation, here are three strategies that work well in large lecture halls because they don't require students to sit in groups or move around the room. Each of these strategies provides a framework for generating discussion, which increases engagement and encourages students to analyze a variety of perspectives. And if you aren't teaching to the masses, these strategies can be easily modified for any class size.

Flipped Strategy #1: Six Thinking Hats

"Six Thinking Hats" is an approach to guide and focus students' thinking, expand their perspectives, and generate creative approaches to solving problems (de Bono, 1999). To implement this strategy, present students with six different colored "hats" to wear as they analyze a situation. The color of the hat reflects the role or perspective you want students to take as they work through the problem: white (data, facts), red (feelings, emotions), yellow (positive view, benefits), black (caution, judgment), green (creativity, new ideas), and blue (summaries, decisions).

For large classrooms, you can assign a different colored hat to six different sections in the room. Students within each section can work in pairs or threes to analyze the problem based on the hat they are assigned. This strategy

can also be designed as an individual learning activity. Provide worksheets or online tools for students to document their thinking related to the hat they are assigned.

Flipped Strategy #2: Paired Jigsaw

The “jigsaw” technique can be an effective way to engage students in large classes. Tewksbury (1995) describes, “In this technique, teams of students are assigned to investigate different aspects of the same problem/issue. Once teams have completed their assignments, members of each team are then dispersed among new groups and teach group members from other teams about what they have learned (322).” Depending on how many students you have, it may not be possible to form groups, but you can adapt this strategy and create a “paired” jigsaw. Pick a topic and assign two separate readings as pre-class work. Assign half the class Reading A and the other half of the class Reading B. Then ask students to come prepared to teach the most important points from their article to their partner. If you need more accountability, ask students to prepare a worksheet or outline that highlights for their partner the most important takeaways from their article.

During class, ask students to form pairs where one partner has completed Reading A and one partner has completed Reading B. Give students time to teach the main points of their article to their partner. If this is a new activity for your students, you may need to provide more structure to help them organize their ideas as they teach.

For more flipped classroom strategies, join Barbi Honeycutt at the **Teaching Professor Technology Conference**. Her preconference workshop titled “Don’t Waste a Minute of Class Time: How to Use Focusing Activities in the Flipped Classroom” is just just one of the four preconference workshops slated for this teaching and learning event.

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Flipped Strategy #3: Paired Jigsaw + Six Thinking Hats

Once you have introduced students to the paired jigsaw and six thinking hats activities, try combining them! Ask students to analyze their reading (Reading A or Reading B) from the perspective of one of the six hats. You can either assign the hat or let them choose which hat they want to wear as they prepare to teach their reading. Then, when they work in pairs, challenge students to see if they can guess which hat their partner is wearing as they analyze the reading. You can also ask students to re-read their article wearing a different colored hat and see if and how their perspectives change. Any of these strategies can then be used to continue conversations or start a class discussion.

Without too much modification, and a little upfront planning, these strategies can be used in the large classroom setting to engage students in higher levels of critical thinking and analysis. These activities can also be designed as individual learning experiences if you want to mix things up and take a break from so many paired and small group tasks.

Teaching large classes is challenging, even without trying to get students involved. There’s more to manage, more to grade, and more to coordinate. But, by including these types of active learning strategies into your large class, you can create an engaging learning experience that allows students to hear from their peers and engage in critical thinking and analysis.

Let’s continue the conversation! What flipped and active learning strategies have you used in your large classes? How do you handle the noise level when students are engaged and talking all at the same time in large classes? Do you have any advice for faculty who are preparing to flip a large class for the first time?

References

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