

# Three Active Learning Strategies You Can Do in 10 Minutes or Less

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A 2015 survey of *Faculty Focus* readers found that the number one barrier preventing faculty from implementing the flipped classroom model and other active learning experiences into their courses is TIME. Faculty reported they don't have time to plan extra learner-centered activities, due to increasing responsibilities, and they don't have time to implement the activities in class because there's too much content to cover.

If you feel this way, you're not alone. But, you can still create engaging learning experiences for students. And you can do it in 10 minutes (or less).

## Why 10 Minutes (or Less)?

In my work, the FLIP is when you “Focus on your Learners by Involving them in the Process.” It's when you “flip” it to your students and involve them in the process of reviewing, connecting, analyzing and creating. But you don't need to redesign your whole course around the flipped model. I always encourage faculty to first look for flippable moments and then add an active learning strategy to those moments.

Other scholars are also sharing the power of using brief active learning strategies to re-engage students and improve learning. In his book, *Small Teaching*, Lang (2016) explains how brief activities “have the power to produce as much or more learning than your anxiously overprepared lecture” (p. 8). We know from educational research and from our own teaching experience that students' attention, focus, and energy decrease as they listen to a straight

lecture. “The longer students sit passively in a class, the more attention drifts from the presentation and the longer the drifts last. If you go more than 15 minutes without an activity, you may have lost more than half of your students” (Felder & Brent, p. 128, 2016).

You may decide to add an activity to the beginning of class to help students review course material or connect their pre-class work to the in-class work. Or, you may pause your lecture at the mid-way point to help students re-focus or review main ideas. Or, you may want to stop lecturing a few minutes before class ends to assess learning or clarify confusion. But, keep it brief. “If you give students too long to solve a problem, you can waste time. Some students finish a task quickly. Others struggle the whole time which increases their frustration. If you keep the activities short and focused – anywhere between five seconds and three minutes – you avoid both problems” (Felder & Brent, p. 124, 2016).

When you deliver a lecture, you are presenting information you know inside and out. But it’s all new to your students. They are trying to keep up with the flow of information and make sense of it. They may listen attentively and take notes, but at some point they will encounter information that is completely new to them and this may impact their ability to stay focused. Felder & Brent (2016) explain, “When people’s cognitive load at a given time exceeds the processing capacity of their working memory, their brain is in a state of cognitive overload, and they will be unable to process new information” (p. 93). Felder & Brent continue, “To keep students from being plunged into cognitive overload by a non-stop flow of information, occasionally turn off the flow” (p. 94).

You can “turn off the flow” by pausing during a lecture and giving students something to DO with the course material. Here are three strategies to try:

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### **What’s Missing?**

Show students a list, diagram, picture, or series of steps related to the course content, but omit a piece of information. Challenge students to guess “What’s Missing?” from the list or image. Examples: list of steps to solve a problem, list of characters in a story, list of sections in a research paper, and a picture of equipment to be used in a lab experiment.

### **“Ah-Ha!” Wall**

As students watch a video, participate in a lecture, or read an article, encourage them to pay attention to “ah ha” moments. An “ah ha” moment is when they notice the content is connected to another idea from the course, something they’ve experienced, or something related to a current issue. Ask them to post their “ah ha” idea on the class “wall.” Use [Padlet](#) or [Note.ly](#) to create a free virtual wall where your students can post digital sticky notes, pictures, videos, or quotes. Review the wall in class and integrate their ideas into the lecture or choose posts from the wall to start a class discussion.

### **Brainstorming Challenge**

If you want students to brainstorm a list of ideas or possible solutions, challenge them to generate more ideas by giving them two six-sided dice. Ask them to roll the two dice, add the

total number together, and that's how many ideas they should add to their list. Example: If you roll a "4" and a "6" then you need to create a list of 10 ideas. Then, you can encourage them to analyze, sort, or prioritize their lists based on a set of criteria. The added pressure of time (10 minutes!) increases the challenge.

I hope these ideas inspire you to find 10 minutes in your next lesson to try an active learning strategy. If you're interested in five more strategies you can do in 10 minutes or less, [download this bonus article](#).

### **Resources:**

Faculty Focus, Magna Publications (2015) *Flipped Classroom Trends: A Survey of College Faculty*. Available online: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/free-reports/flipped-classroom-trends-a-survey-of-college-faculty/>

Felder, R. & Brent, R. (2016). *Teaching and Learning in STEM: A Practical Guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Honeycutt, B. (May 25, 2013). Looking for "Flippable Moments" in Your Class. Faculty Focus. Magna Publications. Available online: <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/blended-flipped-learning/looking-for-flippable-moments-in-your-class/>

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Lang, J. (2016). *Small Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

*Barbi Honeycutt is a speaker, scholar, author, and founder of FLIP It Consulting in Raleigh, N.C. This article is based on her new online mini-course "[10 Active Learning Strategies You Can Do in 10 Minutes or Less](#)."*