



## Active Learning Classrooms Series

### PART 2: Strategies for Effectively Managing in the Active Learning Classroom

Teaching in an active learning classroom can be an exciting yet challenging experience for instructors. One of the main differences between a traditional classroom and an active learning classroom is the design of the space. For example, in place of a podium at the front of the room and rows of desks bolted to the floor, an active learning classroom may have a podium in the middle of the classroom and tables surrounded by rolling chairs, among other configurations (Baepler et al., 2016). Additionally, because students may be unfamiliar with both these classrooms and the active learning activities they afford, it can be important to establish course policies that address issues like communication and personal technology use. Here are a few strategies for how to manage active learning classroom spaces and course policies:

Strategies	Explanation	Teaching Suggestion
Clearly define the goals of each class.	Starting class with a clearly defined objective(s) will shape the class and allow you to bring the discussion back to these goals if necessary.	Start each class by writing the day's objectives on the board, or include a slide with this information in a PowerPoint. Refer back to these objectives as you move between tasks during class.
Identify a central location(s) to stand.	Some ALCs have the instructor podium at the middle while others do not. This means that your back may be to some students at times, which may feel strange. Telling your students where you plan to present and that you may not be facing them at all times can mitigate any strangeness, and will help direct their attention and help to regain focus after small group work.	Consider circling around the podium so that you can see all students throughout the class. Also, consider using apps like <a href="#">Doceri</a> for the iPad so that you can move more freely around the classroom while still changing slides and/or annotating diagrams and writing equations.
Circulate and facilitate.	ALCs are designed so instructors can check-in with teams during collaborative work. Instructors can also use guided instructional practices like step-by-step activities to facilitate learning when teams are problem-solving.	Some students may not be used to an active learning format that prioritizes group work. Therefore, it is important that instructors have an active presence in the classroom by circulating between groups and guiding learning when groups get stuck. If you have TAs, consider breaking the classroom up into zones so that all tables have access to an instructor.
Establish policies for communication.	Setting students expectations for communicating with you, and other instructional members (e.g., teaching assistants) is important. Students may expect immediacy, but need to understand there are demands on your time.	Consider outlining your policy for answering emails and/or communicating via Canvas or other forums, such as Piazza, in your syllabus. Emphasize to students that while you may not respond immediately, you will get back to them, and suggest that they contact you again if you do not respond within 2 days.
Establish policies for technology use.	With the increasing presence of student-owned internet-capable devices in the classroom, digital	Establish a policy that will address digital distractions like texting and social media use, and circulate around the room to help



	<p>distractions are a real concern for any instructor in any classroom (Taneja, Fiore, &amp; Fischer, 2015). This can be especially true in active learning classroom, where technology may play a larger part in in-class student activities.</p>	<p>keep students on task. If students are using technology in the classroom, clarify why you have implemented the policy, how the technology will advance your teaching/their learning, how it will be enforced, whether it complies with ADA regulations, and if an “all or nothing” approach is appropriate.</p>
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**Managing discussions in the active learning classroom**

Small and large group discussions can help students engage more actively with class content than a traditional lecture, and can to gains in understanding of course content. For example, Smith et al. (2009) found that students were more likely to provide correct answers to clicker quizzes when they engaged in peer discussion about those questions. However, managing classroom discussions can be challenging, especially for larger classrooms. Here are a few suggestions for how to facilitate small and large group discussions in active learning classrooms:

Strategies	Explanation	Teaching Suggestion
<p>Establish ground rules for discussions.</p>	<p>These ground rules can help ensure that everyone gets a chance to participate, and that the discussion is respectful of all students’ voices. Additionally, collaborating with students to determine and establish ground rules can be one way to ensure all students feel comfortable, respected, and included.</p>	<p>Possible ground rules include: listen respectfully, without interrupting; respect one another’s view; criticize ideas, not individuals; avoid blame and speculation; avoid inflammatory language. When a ‘hot moment’ comes up, remind students of these guidelines.</p>
<p>Build structure into a discussion.</p>	<p>When discussions are too open-ended, the conversation can tend to steer off topic and content instruction can get lost. Building structure into a discussion so it’s not just free form for students to say anything can help to ensure that the discussion is fruitful for both instructors and students.</p>	<p>Some examples of discussion structures include assigning specific questions for students to discuss in small groups and then turn in a summary of their discussion, or assigning students to investigate and present different sides of a debate or issue to the rest of the class.</p>
<p>Talk to students about how to make valid arguments and substantiating claims using evidence.</p>	<p>To promote civility and liveliness, have students link their claims to evidence. Model citing the literature/research in your own responses and allow them opportunities to practice doing so.</p>	<p>When possible, ask students to tie their responses to specific course readings, theories, and major concepts. For example, you could have students respond to discussion questions in small groups, and require that they cite course readings in their summaries.</p>
<p>Try to clarify the student’s point.</p>	<p>Sometimes, students may intentionally or unintentionally say something offensive during a class discussion. It is important to address these moments in a way that avoids singling out the speaker, but ensures your students understand what is and is not appropriate.</p>	<p>Before reacting to what you interpret to be insulting or inappropriate, give the student a chance to explain by saying “what do you mean by X?” or “I heard you saying X, is that what you meant to say?” For additional suggestions on managing difficult moments in discussions, see our resource on <a href="#">“Charged Discussions.”</a></p>
<p>Use discussion strategies that</p>	<p>It can be difficult to manage students’ attention during discussions, especially given the</p>	<p>One strategy to encourage listening is to require the next speaker to paraphrase the ideas expressed by the previous</p>



<p>require students to listen carefully.</p>	<p>distractions presented by digital devices. Davidson (2017) suggests incorporating metacognitive activities that ask students to reflect on what they have learned through the discussion.</p>	<p>speaker. Davidson (2017) also suggests taking the last three minutes of each class to have students write and turn in an “exit ticket.” This could be one question they still have about the day’s topic, or one thing they learned in class. You can then use these tickets to begin a discussion in the next class.</p>
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**Citation**

Center for Educational Effectiveness [CEE]. (2018). Active Learning Classrooms Series. *Just-in-Time Teaching Resources*. Retrieved from <https://cee.ucdavis.edu/JITT>

**References**

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