

Classroom/Recitation Activities

Free Write: Create a question before class, one that asks who, what, when, where, why but also asks a larger contextual question. Students have five minutes to write down their answers. They can use their notes/textbook/handouts, etc. At the end of the timed writing period you can call on a few students to explain their answers.

Classroom Jeopardy: Make questions in advance. Divide the class into two or three teams. Have the teams designate a “speaker/writer.” That person gets to choose the topic and the level of question. You pose the question to both groups. The group that gets the answer, written in the form of a question (it is Jeopardy after all), correct wins a point. The team with the most points “wins.” Some TAs give ‘real’ prizes, like Halloween candy.

Group Questions: Make a set of four to five questions. Divide class into small groups, the smaller the better. Tell groups to pick one person to write the group’s answer down. Assign one question to each group and give them 3 to 5 minutes to answer the question in their group. It’s okay if more than one group is assigned the same question. After it’s clear that all groups have finished answering the question either have each group send one person to the white board to write their answer OR call on each group to answer the question. If more than one group answered the same question, follow-up by asking the other group if they have anything to add to the first group’s response. You can use questions from the textbook usually found at the end of the chapter or make up your own.

Chunking: Take a longer reading and break it up by chapter or section. Place students in 4-5 member groups and assign each group one section of the reading. They can answer a discussion question, create a list of major themes, or simply make an outline of the narrative or argument. At the end of the working time, have each group ‘teach’ their section to the rest of the class.

Timelines: Have students make timelines based on lecture or reading topics, while also researching and adding context both in the same region/state/nation and elsewhere in the world. They can do this in small groups. Call on each group and ask them to fill in a blank on the timeline.

Debate: Begin with a big idea. For example: “which issue was the most important to the start of the American Revolution?” Have the class create a long list while you write the answers on the whiteboard. Then, by a show of hands, start eliminating the reasons that get the least votes. Do

this for the whole list. Continue, round after round, until you get down to two, then tell students that they need to unanimously agree on one in order to “win.” (The ‘win’ is up to you – bonus points, candy, etc). Students have to persuade each other to get them to agree with their position. At the end, make sure to sum it all up - what’s missing, what should be added back, what issues were working in tandem, etc.

Role playing game: Make cards that assign each student a character or point of view from an assigned reading. Give all the characters a task (they’re on a jury and need to make a decision, they need to decide whether to unionize, join the army, etc.) Have the characters present their position and explain the reasons why they are acting in a certain way.

Making Group Work Work:

- Smaller groups = more engagement
 - large groups make it easier for some students to dominate and others to shirk.
- Ask each student to turn in a sheet of paper with a “grade” for how each person in the group participated. Only you will see this, but they will know that their peers are “grading” them.
- Choose the groups - this allows you to break up groups of friends and get students interact with peers outside of their social network
 - Do this by assigning numbers, using a random group generator, or actually curating groups.
 - Try using base groups – students always know to get into the same group, and develop a rapport with their group over the semester.
- Walk around and be available for questions, but let the group do the work. Hover around groups that aren’t working well.

Getting the Most out of a Recitation:

- Be professional and prepared.
- Remind students by email before recitation to bring textbooks or other needed materials. Having the material on hand means you can always send them to the text.
- Change up your lesson plans. Don’t use small groups every week, alternate with other strategies, especially to account for different learning styles.
- Learn your students’ names and use them.

- Get your students moving. Make them move to get in groups, get up to write on the board, etc.
- The first few minutes of class set the tone. Use a 'hook' to pique interest.
- Plan for more than you'll actually use.
- Fear not the awkward silence.
- Recitations are not lectures.
- Stick to the 'script.' Ask not what *you* want to cover, but what the *professor* wants you to cover.
- Stuck for lesson plans? Have a difficult student? Ask faculty and 'older' TAs for advice!