

# Short Takes For Active Student Participation

While models of group investigation like those by Sharan and Sharan (1992) and others provide students with opportunities to work in-depth and at-length on a topic or theme of their own choosing, there will be times when the teacher will draw on a different repertoire of shorter interactive segments within a class period. Sometimes called "activators" or "energizers," these tools provide learners with an opportunity to process information that has just been presented, read, viewed, or encountered through direct, hands-on experience. Here is a list of short activities you can build into your own lesson design:

1. Turn To Your Neighbor And... (3-5 minutes) "Turn to your neighbor and see if he or she agrees with the statement I have written on the board. If there is a disagreement, how can you use last night's reading assignment to prove the point?"
2. 3-2-1 (3-5 minutes) At the end of an explanation or demonstration, pass out index cards and have each person write down three important terms or ideas to remember, two ideas or facts they would like to know more about, and one concept, process, or skill they think they have mastered. This activity can help make a transition to the next task and lets you check in quickly on their progress.
3. Ticket to Leave (3-5 minutes) This is especially good when an activity concludes just before lunch. Pass out a printed "ticket" about the size of a half sheet of notebook paper. Ask each student to jot down two additional questions about the topic that was just explained or investigated in some way. This reinforces the assumption that you are never finished learning and should continue to ask questions.
4. A Note to a Friend (5-10 minutes) At the end of an explanation or demonstration, pass out a sheet of paper and ask each student to write a note to a friend explaining the process, rule, or concept they have just learned about.
5. Sort The Items (5-10 minutes) The teacher asks students to place ideas, concepts, or statements in categories defined by the teacher. For example, the teacher might ask "Which statements were based on fact?" and "Which statements were based on inference?"
6. Jumbled Summary (5-10 minutes) The teacher writes key words or phrases from an explanation or introduction in a random order on an acetate sheet or on a page to be photocopied. Following the presentation, the teacher asks pairs to "unscramble" the terms and reorder them in correct sequence.
7. Prediction Pairs (5-10 minutes) The teacher asks students to work in pairs as they listen to a short story read by the teacher. The teacher reads a short passage, then pauses to ask the prediction pairs to state "What will happen next?" and "Reasons based on the story so far?"
8. Alphabet Summary (5-10 minutes) At the end of an explanation or demonstration, give each student a different letter of the alphabet and ask them to think of one word or idea beginning with that letter that is connected to the topic just concluded
9. Think, Pair, Share (5-10 minutes) "Think about what you have just heard. Write down three statements about it on an index card." (Pause) "Now exchange your responses with a partner." (Pause) "What were the most frequently mentioned ideas or terms?" (whole group debrief).

10. Draw A Picture (5-10 minutes) At the end of a segment of teacher directed instruction, ask participants to work in pairs to create a graphic summary of how they would organize information, reach a conclusion, or interact differently based on the demonstration you just provided.
11. Three Person Jigsaw (15 minutes) Each person reads a separate page or a portion of a longer selection. Then he or she teaches the main points to the two other members of their study group. Each then quizzes the other members to make sure everyone knows all parts thoroughly.
12. K-W-L Trio (15 minutes) Before a film, lecture, or reading, have students work in threes to write down what they already know about the subject, and what they want to know about the subject. Then show the film, deliver the lecture, or engage the group in the reading. Then have each trio circle the "known" information that was covered, put asterisks next to the questions that were answered, and add other things they learned as a result of the film, lecture, or reading.
13. Drill Partners (15 minutes) Have students drill each other on facts they need to recall until they are certain both partners know and can remember them all. This works effectively with vocabulary terms, sight recognition of birds, leaves, mathematical symbols and shapes, and grammar.
14. Writing Response Groups (20 minutes) Students read and respond to each other's written work by marking passages that they think are effective with a star, and underlining what they don't understand or think is weak. Errors in grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, or format are circled. Then they discuss their observations with the writer.
15. Inside-Outside Circles (10-20 minutes) Organize students into groups of six, with three persons standing with their backs touching and facing out, and three persons forming a circle around them, facing inward toward the person in the center. The teacher directs each pair to exchange information related to previously taught material. Then the teacher asks the persons in the center to rotate, facing a new partner, and chooses a different topic for exchange.
16. Four Corners (15-20 minutes) This is especially effective in social studies or English class, where students encounter a controversial issue. The teacher states a situation or dilemma, then asks students to go to one of four corners of the room, marked Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree. There the students exchange their opinions or reasoning, and summarize their reasoning for the rest of the class.
17. Numbered Heads Together (10 minutes) Students are grouped by teams. Each team member numbers off, so that each member has a number. After working jointly together, the teacher asks a question or presents a problem. The students must jointly agree on the correct answer. The teacher selects a team, and calls a number at random. The student with that number must answer the question, and briefly be able to explain why that answer is correct. If the group has not been able to come up with an answer that all agree to, the team must "pass" until it is called upon again. Numbered Heads can be especially useful when reviewing large "chunks" of material or in helping students prepare for a test.
18. Pairs Check (10-20 minutes) The teacher directs students to work in teams. One person in the pair works on a task while the other serves as coach. Then they exchange roles for the second task. As this point, they ask another pair to check their work. If the second pair agrees with their response, the first pair continues. If not, the pair tries to correct their work.

19. Roundtable (10-20 minutes) The teacher asks a question with many possible answers ("Name all of the items in your home which were not invented 25 years ago.") Using one sheet of paper, students make a list, each person adding one item and then passing the paper to the person on their left. The product is the result of many minds (and hands) at work--hence roundtable.
20. Send-a-Problem (10-20 minutes) Each student on a team makes up a question or review problem and writes it down on a flashcard. The author of each problem/question asks the question of his/her team members. If they do not have consensus on the answer, the group works on the problem or rewords it until everyone can explain/agree. Next, the team passes their stack of review questions to another team for review.
21. Group Test Taking for Practice (20 minutes) The day before a test, give student groups copies of earlier versions of your test or questions similar to those that will actually be on the test. Tell them that "Tomorrow you will get a test like this as individuals, and there will be no team to help you. You can help each other all you want today. Make sure your teammates can get a perfect score. Help everyone understand."

## Summing Up

Group activities do not have to take a long time. You can organize people into pairs or threes and ask them to do the following in five minutes, at the most!

1. Describe what they have just heard about a topic.
2. Explain important points or distinctions to each other.
3. Compare responses to a hypothetical situation to provide.
4. List the attributes of a condition or skill, or make up rules for governing a situation.
5. Predict what will happen if...
6. Estimate the consequences of...
7. Identify patterns in... These short assignments break up a longer stretch of "input" on your part, serve to energize learners, and give you a springboard for further exposition that is more on target with student's, interests, or abilities.

## Selected References

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