

# Active Learning Techniques for Online Courses

By  
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**Adapted from:** Learning Preferences & Active Learning Techniques for University 101 by Dr. Bonnie B. Mullinix

## **Brainstorming**

This technique encourages active and imaginative input from participants while tapping (and assessing) their knowledge and expertise. The role of the online instructor is to encourage all students to say the first thing that comes to their minds and to keep ideas flowing quickly.

*When to use:* Brainstorming is used to help focus or clarify activities or generate information that can help begin a topic.

*Online Resources:* The Blackboard Wiki tool can be used for brainstorming activities in an online course. Also, Padlet (<https://padlet.com/>) is a good brainstorming tool. If you use Padlet, include a link to the Padlet privacy policy in your course syllabus.

## **Mind Maps**

Mind mapping is a special type of brainstorming. It involves creating a map or web that provides a visual organization of a concept, linking it to associated terms and ideas situated within participants' existing knowledge base. Mind maps encourages students to build, articulate and recognize their personal relationships to and understanding of key concepts. There are several free websites that students can use to build a mind map. Be sure to include the

*When to use:* Mind maps can be used to introduce or deepen a critical idea or concept.

*Online Resources:* Bubbl.us (<https://bubbl.us>) and Mindmup (<https://www.mindmup.com/>) are free online concept map websites. Be sure to include the link to the websites privacy policy in your course syllabus. Include a link to a video tutorial that will show students how to create the map.

## **Case Studies**

This technique encourages students to analyze situations they might encounter and determine how they would respond. A case study is basically a story written to show a detailed description of an event followed by questions for participants to discuss. It can range from a paragraph to several pages in length. Case studies that pose problems, identify context and challenges and provide enough details to prompt discussion and possible solutions.

*When to use:* Use case studies to promote deeper learning and analysis. They can be used as the basis for a class discussion.

*Online Resources:* The Discussion Forum tool in Blackboard can be used for students to post a response to a case study.

## **Video Presentations**

Videos can be arranged for students to view in direct support of their learning. Video clips can be equally effective if well chosen, integrated and supported to connect to the lesson topic.

*When to use:* To support a lesson topic or to introduce a topic. A single video clip should be no more than 5 minutes in length. Longer videos should be broken into shorter segments.

*Online Resources:* Youtube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) and TED Talks ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) are good sources for video presentations.

## **Games**

Games are structured activities that have a certain number of players who are working in a special situation to accomplish a task according to certain rules. Crosswords puzzles or Word Finds can be a fun way to help students learn new terminology.

*When to use:* To help students learn new skills or practice skills they have recently learned.

*Online Resources:* There are several free crossword puzzles and Word Find makers on the web.

## **Taking a Stand**

Students “take a stand” on a particular topic or issue, identifying and considering/re-considering their opinion as they share and compare their rationales for their chosen stand.

*When to use:* This technique promotes student-student interaction, discussion and critical thinking by encouraging students to “take a stand”.

*Software Resources:* The Blackboard Discussion tool can be used by students to post their positions and to allow others challenge that position.

## **Polling/Survey**

A poll or survey can be distributed to collect feedback from students.

*When to use:* Polls or surveys can be used to introduce a topic.

*Software Resources:* The Blackboard survey tool can be used to create and distribute student surveys.

## **Small Group Activities**

Group activities are an excellent way to facilitate student-student collaboration. Optimal group size is 4-6 for task-related activities. The purpose of the task is clearly stated, and a time limit imposed. How the group’s work is to be presented is clearly defined, and shared responsibility is given to all member of the group. The smaller the group, the greater the chance for individual participation.

*When to use:* To facilitate student-student collaboration for problem-solving and team activities.

*Software Resources:* The Blackboard Group Tool can be used to create small groups in your online class.