IT’S LIKE PULLING TEETH TO GET THEM TO SAY ANYTHING...

COMMON REASONS STUDENTS MIGHT NOT BE SPEAKING UP IN CLASS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

One of the most panic-inducing experiences is standing at the front of the classroom asking questions and finding nothing but silence and students avoiding eye contact. It can be easy to think that students don’t like you, are being lazy, or don’t care enough. But, more often than not, there are some barriers that can be hard to see from the front of the class—especially when you’ve got your own anxiety or nerves to handle. This month’s tips are some easy ways to get students to engage with the material, with each other, and with you!

"TEACHING, WITHOUT LEARNING, IS JUST TALKING.

- K. PATRICIA CROSS
ACTIVE LEARNING FRAMEWORKS
GETTING YOUR STUDENTS TO TALK IN CLASS

Active Learning is a phrase that gets tossed around a lot in academia. It can be confusing and seem like extra work. But, research has shown that active learning frameworks are great at getting students to participate in class and are more effective at helping students learn. Here are two super easy things you can incorporate into your class (no matter what discipline) to help with student engagement! You can also find additional activities [here](#).

THINK—PAIR—SHARE

Level: Easy
Preparation: Minimal
Length: Short and sweet

In a think-pair-share students are given time to wrap their heads around a question before they are asked to share in front of the whole class.

- **Think: Pose a question to your students.** Look at these tips for creating good questions. Give them a bit of time to consider the question and jot down some thoughts they have.

- **Pair: Have students partner up with someone.** This can be someone near them or you can assign partners. Remember that for an inclusive classroom community, assigning partners (even if randomly) can help make sure all of your students are able to talk to new people and make sure that some aren’t left out or avoided due to biases. Sometimes you can also make trios. If your students are extra nervous having three people can put them more at ease. The students then share their thoughts with their partner.

- **Share:** After students have discussed in pairs, bring the whole class back together and ask for volunteers to speak or call on different pairs to share what they discussed together.

- **This activity also works great with review questions and problem based questions like solving equations.**

THEY SAID...I’LL ADD

Level: Easy
Preparation: Minimal
Length: Variable

In this activity students work together to summarize ideas and elaborate on them. This framework can be used to get everyone talking or can be incorporated into a larger discussion.

- **Begin by asking a question that doesn’t have a clear, easy, or concise answer.** It needs to have enough breadth or depth that a number of students can comment on it without completely repeating the same ideas or simply saying the correct answer. **Boss Tip:** Use a think-pair-share to have your students create questions at the start of class and then use that question in this activity.

- **Have one person start by proposing some sort of answer to the question.** They can also share what they find confusing about the question.

- **The next person (usually the one sitting next to them) then starts by saying “they said” and summarize what the person before them shared.** After summarizing they then say “and I’ll add” where they input their own thoughts.

- **This can continue as long or short as you like.**

- **It is a great exercise for hearing every voice in the room.** However, it can be time consuming, so make sure you are allotting yourself enough time.
DEAN FROM START OF THE COURSE.

Help! I know it’s a few weeks into the semester, but I’m still on the struggle bus trying to learn my students’ names. I have even called some of them the wrong name. I feel so bad and so embarrassed. Is there any way to get better at learning student names?

I feel you on your struggle here. Learning names was difficult before needing to wear masks—and adding extra trouble, consider asking students to post a selfie with their mask on into a google doc along with their name and pronouns. This way you can practice using the visuals you actually see in class.

Here are a few thoughts:

1) If you haven’t already, check out your photo roster. It has pictures of all of your students in a nice neat grid. You can learn how to access it here: https://go.wisc.edu/dn5d88

Using these pictures can be incredibly helpful. A lot of TAs use them to make flash cards at the start of the course.

I’ve been using this trick, but I’m not sure it’s been that helpful. I feel you on your struggle here.

2) Have students use name tents. This helps because you can see the student and their name and pronouns every time you scan the room. You can then slowly phase them out as you get more comfortable.

This lets students know you care and keeps you from calling someone the wrong name/pronoun all semester.

3) Tell students you really want to learn their names and pronouns and that you want them to correct you if you call them by the wrong name.

If a student corrects you about their name or pronoun, be sure to thank them and correctly repeat it back to them. For example, “I’m so sorry for calling you Alex. Thanks for correcting me, Alec.”

4) If masks are causing you extra trouble, consider asking students to post a selfie with their mask on into a google doc along with their name and pronouns. This way you can practice using the visuals you actually see in class.

5) Have students sit in the same seats, especially at the beginning of the semester. Having a spatial reference can really help jog your memory.

6) This may seem obvious to some, but it took me a while to learn—use your students’ names as often as possible and have students interact with each other using names. This repetition can really help cement the names in your mind.

Hopefully these strategies will help you going forward!

- A TA That’s Been There

READER’S PUZZLE & A QUICK NOTE

FROM L&S ASSISTANT DEAN: LYNNE PROST

Hello L&S TAs!

Welcome to the first issue of Learning Forward, a newsletter produced by L&S Teaching and Learning Administration.

Our group is here to support you and all the wonderful work you do for our L&S students!

Special thanks to those of you who attended our TA Training event on September 2. It was fantastic to connect with so many new TAs! We are all constantly growing as teachers, so please seek out professional development opportunities to continue the journey you started at TA training. We hope that these newsletters will provide one such opportunity for you to learn and grow throughout your time as a TA.

I also want to especially thank Dani Clevenger, Gullickson fellow, for putting together this first newsletter. Watch for monthly newsletters in the future, which will include helpful tips and tricks you can use to improve the learning in your classroom. We aim to highlight your voices: to answer your questions and share your successes.

Please use this link to submit questions, stories, ideas and suggestions for future newsletters.

Keep up all the great work and please reach out for support!

Lynne Prost
Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning Administration, College of Letters & Sciences
TEACHING WINS: ELISE WHATLEY

ELISE IS A FIRST-TIME TA IN THE PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

I am passionate about philosophy and the various ways it manifests in our everyday lives. For instance, you may not realize it, but as you go about your day satisfying the demands of your job, negotiating a new business deal, or merely defending your restaurant of choice, you may be doing philosophy. Any task that seeks to define, defend, argue, or delineate by appeal to reasons and evidence is an instance of philosophy. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to demonstrate to students how philosophy is relevant to them now or will be of use to them in their future careers. It is especially difficult as a TA when you’re expected to cover a lot of complicated material in only 50 minutes each week. This is a challenge I was determined to overcome. So, I got creative. I decided to try and structure our weekly ice breaker in a way that demonstrates the use of philosophy in daily life. The question I chose was: “If aliens came to earth, assuming you had a choice, would you allow them to beam you up?” I decided to add a little follow up to that: “If ‘yes,’ what are your conditions?”

Using this activity, I was able to point out to them that when they answer questions such as this with “Yes, but...” they are conveying necessary conditions for their going along with the aliens. So, I explained, as they go about their daily lives, they often identify necessary conditions for things (e.g. in requests, requirements, etc.) without even realizing it. More importantly, just doing so is doing a subtle form of philosophy! This is a small victory, indeed. But it allowed me to relate philosophy to the students on a personal level without taking up time we needed to dedicate to class content. I am excited to see what else I can come up with and hope to contrive even more creative and relatable examples!

GET IN TOUCH!

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! YOU CAN USE THIS FORM TO:

- SUBMIT A READER’S PUZZLE
- NOMINATE SOMEONE FOR A TEACHING WIN FEATURE (SELF NOMINATIONS WELCOME).
- SUGGEST FUTURE TOPICS TO BE COVERED.

CHECK IT OUT!

WEEKLY TEACHING & LEARNING FORUMS OFFERED BY CTLM, EACH WEDNESDAY.

HTTPS://GO.WISC.EDU/09D6D2

BEYOND THE TENURE TRACK: A SERIES OF EVENTS HOSTED BY THE GRADUATE SCHOOL.

HTTPS://GO.WISC.EDU/4UMT10