

A Change-Up Sampler

The list below presents over a dozen "change-up" options. You should be able to find a few here that work for you. On that dark night of the teaching soul, when you have run out of ideas for a change-up, pick something new from this list.

Student Generated Questions:

Write a Question

The simplest of these techniques: instead of saying "Are there any questions?" ask each student to write down one to three they have about the material that was just covered. Then ask several students (volunteers at first) what their questions are and answer them (or get other students to answer them). Having students write their questions down gives them all a chance to acknowledge what they really do not know. Seeing the questions in writing helps them feel authorized to ask them.

Exam Questions

Alone, or in pairs or small groups, ask students to write an exam question about the material that was just covered (they should follow the format of your actual exams- essay, multiple-choice, etc.). After allowing brief time for discussion, ask a few groups (or individuals) to present their questions to the entire class. Write these on the board and ask other students to critique them (give specific criteria). You can then collect all of the written questions; use the best ones on the exam!

Problem Solving:

Paired Discussions

In three or four minutes, have students engage in discussion with the person next to them: summarize class so far; react to theory, concepts, or information being presented; relate today's material to past learning, etc. Make your questions or discussion topics as specific as you can.

Think (or Write) - Pair – Share

Pose a specific question that requires analysis, evaluation, or synthesis. Each student thinks, or writes, on this question for one minute, then turns to the person seated nearby to compare ideas. The pairs then share their ideas with a larger group (pairs of pairs, section of the class, or whole class).

Concrete Images

To help students make specific references to the text, go around the room and ask each of them to state a concrete image, scene, topic, incident, or moment that stands out to them. List these on the board. Follow up by asking students to find themes or patterns, missing points, etc. Then, discussion can move to analysis with a common collection of facts.

Generating Ideas:

Buzz Groups

Give one or two prepared questions to groups of three to five students. Each group records its discussion and reports to the whole class. Then help the class synthesize the groups' answers.

Truth Statements

Ask several small groups to decide on three things they know to be true about a particular issue. This is useful when introducing a new topic that students *think* they know well, but may be surprised to learn their assumptions need to be examined.

Kisses and Crackers

To overcome the fading of attention, when you notice energy and responsiveness diminishing, pass out crackers and Hershey's kisses. The professor who taught us this technique tells us that research in "accelerated learning" shows that eating about once per hour actually promotes learning. Not only does the food wake students up, but the mere act of passing the bags around changes the activity and refocuses attention. He says that this also helps students to feel good about him and his class and overcome [science] anxiety.

Controversial Topics:

Reaction Sheet

After presenting a controversial topic, pass around several sheets to collect written reactions to these three questions: "What ideas do you question?" "What ideas are new to you?" and "What ideas really hit home?" Follow up with discussion. A variation on this would be to have students work with small groups when responding to these questions.

Value Lines

Students line up according to how strongly they agree or disagree with a proposition or how strongly they value something. This gives a visual reading of the continuum of feelings in the group. Next, sort students into heterogeneous discussion groups by grouping one from either end with two from the middle. Ask students to listen to differing viewpoints in their groups and to paraphrase opposing positions fairly.

Forced Debate

Ask all students who agree with a proposition to sit on one side of the room and all opposed on the other side. Hanging signs describing the propositions helps. It is important that they physically take a position and that the opposing sides face each other. After they have sorted themselves out, switch the signs and force them to argue for the position with which they disagree. This activity, which pushes "Value Lines" one step further, is one of very few activities that plunge people into temporary ownership of viewpoints in opposition to their own strongly held opinions.

Student Self-Evaluation:

Ask the students write a brief evaluation of their learning. After an essay (or project), ask them to answer the following:

Now that you have finished your essay [or project], please answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers; I am interested in your analysis of your experience with writing this essay [or doing this project].

(Instructors may select from the following list)

- What problems did you face while writing this essay [project]?
- What solutions did you find for those problems?
- What do you think are the strengths of this essay [project]?
- What alternative plans for this essay [project] did you consider? Why did you reject them?
- Imagine you had more time to write this essay [work on this project]. What would you do if you were to continue working on it?

Variation of Media:

And finally, **varying media** often provides a useful change-up. Slides, web pages, overheads, pictures, video clips, music, or sound can refocus attention and provide a shared experience which students can then critically "unpack" in discussion. Remember to give context for the new material, to show or play only what you need, and to direct student attention to the aspects of the material you regard as especially important.