

Concept Exploration: Pique Student Interest

The three steps in the cycle of active learning are to:

1. assign students an activity that has them explore a new topic or concept;
2. introduce or teach the topic using a microlecture, text, or video; and
3. give students an assignment that requires they apply what they have learned in an authentic setting.

Think-Pair-Share

We can teach more effectively by capturing and maintaining student attention. This can be accomplished by posting a thought-provoking problem, question, video, or quote related to the learning goals and then having students reflect upon the concepts. This activity can be the first step in the Active Learning Cycle.

The Think-Pair-Share activity is a great way to engage students in exploring new content or a new concept. For this activity, assign pairs to discuss their responses to the content you shared with the class. Exploring ideas with their peers helps students raise questions and develop greater curiosity to learn more about the topic.

The box below demonstrates the steps a biology instructor takes in using a Think-Pair-Share activity to pique student interest.

1. Post the following quotation in the class discussion forum: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” —John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*
2. Pair students up. If there is an odd number of students in your class, you can assign one group of three students. Ask students to discuss with their partner(s) either by email, chat, text, or phone.
3. Ask students to discuss in their assigned pairs what they believe to be the meaning of this statement. Ask them to provide examples of when this is true or not true. Have each pair post a joint response to the quotation in the discussion forum by a certain date and time before you post the lesson resources.
4. Create a video (or presentation during a synchronous class) to review some of the students’ responses and then move into the second step in the Active Learning Cycle (Concept Introduction). In this example, the instructor may begin teaching about the Sahara dust that blows across the Atlantic Ocean and fertilizes the Amazon Rainforest. Without the phosphorus in the Saharan dust, the soil of the Amazon would not have enough nutrients to sustain the rainforest. The instructor may then explain how this exemplifies the John Muir quotation.

Sources

Nilson, L. B., & Goodson, L. A. (2018). *Online teaching at its best: Merging instructional design with teaching and learning research*. Jossey-Bass.