

Student-Active Breaks

Unsure of how to break up your lecture into manageable 10- to 15-minute segments? Consider using these activities to segment your lecture. Each of these techniques should take less than 5 minutes to implement.

Purpose	Activity	Description
Review content	Pair and compare	Students pair off with their neighbor and compare lecture notes, filling in any points they may have missed.
Recall content	Periodic recall	Students put away their notes and write down the most important 2-3 points from the lecture, as well as any questions they have. Students may then work in pairs or triads to respond to the questions they generated.
Recall content	Listen, recall, and ask then pair, compare, and answer	Students only listen to your lecture; no note-taking is allowed. Then they open their notebooks and write down all the major points they can recall, as well as any questions they have. Instruct students to leave generous space between the major points they write down. Finally, they pair with their neighbor and compare lecture notes, filling in any points they may have missed and answering one another's questions.
Recall content	Reorder the steps	Students correctly sequence items that you present to them in mixed order. These items may be elements of a procedure, process, cycle, method, plan, strategy, or technique.
Recall content	Paraphrase the idea	Students put an idea—a definition, theory, statement, procedure, or description—into their own words. This task can be just a check on their comprehension, or you can make it a little more challenging by adding the twist of targeting the paraphrase to a specific audience.
Review content	Multiple-choice item	Post a multiple-choice item related to your lecture and give four response options. Survey student responses. You can also ask students to rate their confidence level in their response. Then give them a minute to convince their neighbor of their answer and resurvey their responses. This activity, developed by Mazur (1997), asks students to apply and discuss lecture content while it's fresh in their minds. It also lets you know how well they have understood the material. You can then clarify misconceptions before proceeding to new material.
Reflect on content	Reflection or reaction paragraph	Students individually write out their affective reaction to lecture content (or video or demonstration). Ask a few volunteers to share.
Apply content	Solve a problem	Students solve an equational or word problem based on your lecture. They can work individually or, better yet, in ad hoc pairs or triads. Randomly call on a few individuals or groups to share their responses.

Apply content	Complete a sentence starter	Students complete a sentence stem related to your lecture content. The completed statement may be a definition, a category, a cause-and-effect relationship, an implication, a rationale, or a controversy. Present students with a sentence starter that requires reflection and higher order thinking, not just rote knowledge, to complete.
Analyze content	Compare and contrast	Students identify similarities or differences between parallel elements in your lecture, such as theories, methods, models, events, problems, solutions, or artistic or literacy works.
Analyze content	Correct the error	Using lecture content, students correct an error in a statement, equation, or visual that you have intentionally made. The error may be an illogical or inaccurate statement, premise, inference, prediction, or implication.
Analyze content	Support a statement	Students garner support for a statement—conclusion, inference, theory, opinion, or description—you present. Sources of support may be your lecture, the readings, or evidence they generate on their own.
Analyze content	Pair and discuss	Students pair off with their neighbor to discuss an open-ended question that asks them to apply, analyze, or evaluate content from the lecture or to synthesize it with other course materials. This question should have multiple possible correct answers. Have students outline their answers in writing. This activity allows students to examine, extend, and process your lecture content and serves as a prelude to a general class discussion.
Physical break	Seventh-inning stretch	For a few minutes, play some popular music and have students get out of their seats and stretch. Afterward, students often seem more alert.