

# Need To Get The Spark Back In Class Time?

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## Spice up those lesson plans with different types of activities!

Have you been feeling like class time has been a little dull? Not sure what you can do to get the excitement back?

Well, if you've just been going through the same routine over and over of just reading off your lecture notes or powerpoint slides try inserting these activities.

**Do Now:** This isn't just for secondary school. Get your students thinking as soon as they come in the room with a short activity that will set them up for the coming discussions or lectures.

**Interactive Lecture:** Here you should provide information, but still have your students be active learners. For example, asking them to give an example, or seeing how they can break it down or explain to each other.

**Primary Source Analysis:** Your students can read something that was not part of their out-of-class reading, then create questions (in groups or not in groups--it's up to you!).

**Mini-Debates:** Set up these small-scale debates based on readings they have already done.

**Jigsaw:** In this activity, you break the class apart into groups. Each group specializes in or learns one topic together and then is in charge of teaching the other groups about their focus.

**Silent Conversations:** In this silent debate between two people, each pair is given a pro and con side to a controversial topic. Each side then has one minute to silently write down their perspective on that argument. Then, each person switches papers with their partner, reads the response, and responds to their partner silently for another minute. This conversation can continue multiple times.

**Film Clips with Guiding Questions:** When showing a film, you should always have an action that goes with it, be it a set of questions or a response. You should try to have your students be active learners (not passive receivers) even when watching a movie.

**Create a Poem or Song:** Have your students write a poem or a song that speaks to the text, or their interpretation or reaction to the text.

**Write A Story:** Have students read a perspective on a text or issue and then have them write a story representing what they think a person with another perspective might believe.

# Tired of endless grading?

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## Try Minimal Marking!

It's the end of the semester, and you're dreading the hours and hours of grading on your commute home, in cafes and even while driving (well, hopefully not)! After all of your work, you're not even sure if students will learn from your pages and pages of ink. But what if you could grade more effectively, in less time AND help your students? Thankfully, there are several strategies you can employ through "Minimal Marking."

Here are a few suggestions:

- ❖ **Don't correct all mistakes.** Research in composition has shown that students learn much more about error correction when they have to find and correct their own errors. Instead, make a checkmark next to the line and ask students to find the problems. Usually, they will catch the error on a second read.
- ❖ **Identify patterns of errors and point them out.** Say they are having trouble with subject verb agreement or past tenses. Correct one or two problems with subject verb agreement and then ask them to go through the rest of the paper and correct the others.
- ❖ **"Sit on your hands/put away the red pen."** If you are requiring your students to resubmit a paper, try to resist the urge to correct everything. Limit yourself to 2-3 elements the next draft should address such as conceptualization and organization. Papers that are covered in comments (however useful) are often overwhelming and do not help the student see a path to revision.
- ❖ **Grading rubrics:** Giving students a breakdown of how you will grade their papers offers you an easy way to justify a grade and explain areas for improvement without the necessity of correcting line-by-line.
- ❖ **Ask the students to talk about revisions.** If you've allowed for multiple drafts, prior to the students handing in a final paper, ask them to reflect briefly on how they've incorporated your changes. This works to prevent them from just resubmitting without addressing each of your points and allows you to focus on how the writing has or has not progressed.

# Plagiarism-Proof Assignments

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## Tips and strategies

*Every semester, do you think, "I can never win the battle with plagiarism?" Well, here is some advice for making your writing assignments strong enough to stand up to even the most insidious of plagiarisms!*

### **Before you give out your assignment:**

- Some students truly do not know what plagiarism is. Provide handouts explaining the concept and make sure they know what the rules of citation and paraphrasing and/or dedicate a few minutes of class time to clarify.
- Try to minimize contradictions in assignment. For example: Develop a topic based on what has already been said and written BUT Write something new and original; Rely on experts' and authorities' opinions BUT Improve upon and/or disagree with those same opinions

### **Assignment Development:**

- **Avoid open-ended topics.** Rather, provide a clear list of potential topics that ask critical-thinking questions.
- **Change assignments from semester to semester.** Give unique topics with a "twist"
- **Emphasize the importance of the student's own contribution to the topic,** his/her ability to "improve on" or disagree with experts, to give his/ her own contributions to the field.
- **Require Specific Components to the Paper.** Some strong inhibitors to plagiarism include asking students to use:
  - Up-to-date sources
  - Books or articles you have provided
  - Charts/ data you have given
  - Interviews
  - Prohibit students from changing topics
- **"Scaffold" your assignment into "steps"**
  - Include summaries and response papers
  - Require an annotated bibliography
- **Use exploratory writing** like keeping a project log to document the research process
- **Require oral reports of student papers.** If students know at the beginning of the term that they will be giving a presentation on their research papers to the rest of the class, they will recognize the need to be very familiar with both the process and the content of the paper.
- **Require a postscript on the day the paper is due,** also called a "metalearning essay," that asks students to describe what they learned from the assignment. This effective in not only getting students to reflect on their writing and researching process, but allows for more insight into whether or not they accomplished that progress truthfully.

# Get more out of your students' writing assignments

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## Useful tips and strategies

Are you frustrated with the quality of your students writing?  
Do you feel they are just not “getting” the assignment?  
Ever wonder if there was something you could do to **produce better results**?  
Thankfully, there are tools that can offer you that are **guaranteed to work!**

Here are just a few of the strategies that you can employ.

- **Consider what you want the assignment to do, in terms of the larger goals of your course.** What do you want your students to get out of their work besides just “going through the motions”? What types of responses do you want them to produce?
- **Consider the order of assignments.** They can be a sequence of writing challenges that build on each other!
- **Be specific about everything in your assignment (even if you want it to be open-ended).** Be explicit about the form you want the writing to take, the purpose (why are the students writing this?) and the process (where/how do they start).
- **Break your assignment down into specific questions and tasks.** This can help the students know where to start and where to go from there.
- **Make sure you've defined clearly all the terms you've used in your assignment.** Are you taking certain jargon for granted?
- **Be clear about what you don't want.** This can save a lot of time everyone!
- **Type up your assignment and give it out.** Students have varied language proficiencies and having a written assignment can help every student no matter where they fall on that continuum.
- **Try to write (or at least to outline) the assignment yourself.** If you can't answer your own question, your students probably can't either!