Increasing student engagement in the classroom

Western Sydney University has a diverse range of learning facilities and spaces, ranging from traditional classrooms, seminar rooms, laboratories, lecture spaces and learning studios. Regardless of the type of learning space, we often face common issues from time to time around student engagement.

This guide is a quick reference point to assist with some advice and links to resources to maximise student engagement in classroom settings.

| Classroom activity / issue | What is the scenario? | What is important? | What to do? …. Tips and resources |
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| You would like students to engage in a group activity where **access to digital technology is required** (using their own devices or digital tools in the classroom). | Students access their devices or classroom based technology and you want to ensure that they stay focussed. Students are working in groups and you want them to share / present their findings with other groups. | Students should be provided with clear instructions about the task, the tool/s to use and the outcomes required, to avoid moving off track.  There should also be an indication of the time frame allowed for the activity. | * You can provide structure by preparing a simple activity sheet (or use a single slide image) listing each step students need to take, along with the tools they should use. * Move around and briefly visit student groups and add comments or feedback while students are working. * Idea sharing does not have to be limited to presentations in front of the class. You could encourage two groups to share ideas between them – particularly useful when some groups work more quickly than others, or when other groups need support. * You could set up a shared document (such as Google Doc) that everyone can access to encourage group/class sharing of ideas and to keep groups on task.   LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES:   * The following resources provide some tips about different types of activities that you might use to encourage group discussion and collaboration:   [Ideas for activities to enhance engagement](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/learning_futures/home/ct/curriculum/curriculum_resources/flipped_classrooms)  [Tips to help create an engaging learning environment](http://www.edutopia.org/project-learning-teaching-strategies)  Ideas for [small groups and discussions](https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions)  [Tips for make class discussions more exciting](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/make-class-discussions-more-exciting-richard-curwin)  [Ideas for activities to enhance engagement](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/learning_futures/home/ct/curriculum/curriculum_resources/flipped_classrooms)   * [Introduction to the learning studios (student orientation) video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U-rQw9Mnv0) (specific tips for those who are working in learning studios)   Some interesting free apps you may like to review and use to engage students in class *(this list provides a few examples, although there are numerous free APPS depending on your purpose):*   * Socrative: <https://www.socrative.com/> * Kahoot: <https://kahoot.com/> * Padlet: <https://padlet.com/> * Powtoon: <https://www.powtoon.com/home/> |
| You would like students to engage in group discussions where **technology is not required** | Students access any technology based devices and you want to ensure that they stay focussed. Students are working in groups and you would like them to discuss the topic *without* referring to technology (such as Google). | Students should be provided with clear instructions about the task, the tool/s to use and the outcomes required, to avoid moving off track. There should also be an indication of the time frame allowed for the activity. | * You can provide structure by preparing a simple activity sheet (or use a single slide image) listing each step students need to take, along with the tools they should use. * Move around and briefly visit student groups and add comments or feedback, while students are working. * Idea sharing does not have to be limited to presentations in front of the class. You could encourage two groups to share ideas between them – particularly useful when some groups work more quickly than others, or when other groups need support.   LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES:   * The following resources provide some tips about different types of activities that you might use to encourage group discussion and collaboration:   [Ideas for activities to enhance engagement](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/learning_futures/home/ct/curriculum/curriculum_resources/flipped_classrooms)  [Tips to help create an engaging learning environment](http://www.edutopia.org/project-learning-teaching-strategies)  Ideas for [small groups and discussions](https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/resources/teaching/small-groups-and-discussions)  [Tips for make class discussions more exciting](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/make-class-discussions-more-exciting-richard-curwin)  [Ideas for activities to enhance engagement](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/learning_futures/home/ct/curriculum/curriculum_resources/flipped_classrooms)   * You may like to set the following timer on a central board so students can note the time available for the activity. [Online Timer Example](http://www.online-stopwatch.com/full-screen-stopwatch/) |
| Maintaining focus during group discussions | Groups may be asked to collaborate on any number of activities and take notes or present findings to the rest of the group. Sometimes, groups or individuals may be distracted from the task at hand. | It is critical for students to understand the outcome required from the task-at- hand. Giving feedback on student progress with activities also helps keep students focussed and on the right track (feedback may be peer – peer or tutor – peer). | * Walk from group to group checking progress; assign a group leader to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to have their say and to ensure the group takes notes. * Ask the group to set up a Google Doc (or similar) that can be shared with the group (and possibly later with the class). * Where there is a group falling behind, it may be worthwhile to ask another group that is progressing well to share their ideas. Ask some students to move around to other groups and share ideas generally among their peers. * Ask questions as you move between groups to prompt thinking and discussion on the topic- at-hand. * Confirm that groups understand the task requirements. |
| Ensuring that everyone is listening to what others in the group or class are saying and ensuring that everyone can be heard. | Classrooms can become quite noisy when there are lots of discussion, making it difficult to hear what is being said. | The facilitator is responsible for creating an environment where students are able to discuss ideas and listen to other group members’ ideas and presentations without extraneous noise. | * Situate yourself in the *middle* of the room while students are discussing ideas or ‘presenting’ to the rest of the class. This provides a little more *control* over the class. * You may ask each of the ‘audience’ groups to think of one question to ask the presenting group * If you are working in a learning studio, you could also mute any ceiling microphones during the activity until each group is ready to speak. |
| Avoiding distractions from phones, social media, side conversations and late comers to class. | * In the current environment it is inevitable that students have their phones nearby during class time. They may be distracted by incoming calls & messages, off-topic discussions, and social media use not relevant to the activity-at-hand. | * Students use the class time productively and effectively. Students also need to understand the required outcomes of the class session. | * Set clear expectations at the start of the teaching period. You might allow the class to take ownership of their behaviour by setting class ‘expectations/rules’ for use of mobile phones, late comers etc. (The facilitator should also be allowed to have a say!). *Most of the time groups agree that mobile use during class should be restricted. They usually also agree that late comers should be expected to come in quietly.* * Be consistent! At the start of each session, remind students to set their phones to silent, turn off social media alerts and lower the volume on appropriate multimedia. * Use phones and other devices to your advantage. You might set activities that require the use of phones and other technologies to complete the class activities (e.g. game style quizzes or Google searching). *While students are engaged in these activities, the phone is being used productively.* * For students who are consistently distracted, it may be beneficial to have a one on one private discussion to *engage* the student on a more personal level. * Side conversations occur for many reasons. Ensure tasks are interesting, structured and time bound so groups get engaged and know what is expected. * You can also consider different types of tasks to encourage engagement. For example, a debate, role play or TED talk clip may encourage engagement whilst reading a journal article may have students disengaging. * Move among the class and talk to students informally. Seek feedback on why students are being distracted or clarify if they need additional help.     LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES:  [From Distraction to Engagement: Wireless Devices in the Classroom](http://er.educause.edu/articles/2009/12/from-distraction-to-engagement-wireless-devices-in-the-classroom)  [10 ways to promote student engagement](http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-teaching-strategies/10-ways-to-promote-student-engagement/) |
| Avoiding delays and distractions from overly demanding students. | Individual students may want to talk at length to the lecturer/tutor during class time about their specific circumstances (e.g. querying assessment results or asking about individual assignment questions). | Students should be given an avenue for consultation, however class time should focus on the entire class, rather than individuals. (*Consider a class of 25 people who each require a 2-minute personal discussion*!) | * Acknowledge the concern but invite the student to make an appointment outside of class time, or to put their questions/concerns in writing in an email. * Give holistic, class based feedback after assessment tasks so that individual class members understand how they are generally performing. * Ensure that assessment feedback is thorough and indicates areas of satisfactory and high performance as well as areas for improvement. Students then have quality information about why they have received a particular score and may be less likely to require additional consultation time. * Set aside regular time for general questions during class. * Allow more specific questions to be *parked* for later discussion (come back to the question at an appropriate time). |
| Ensuring appropriate and respectful behaviours with one another in classes, face to face groups and online environments. | Group assignments often require in and out of class collaborations. These are often recorded via Google Docs, Facebook groups or other digital mechanisms | Students must behave respectfully and appropriately in all interactions with peers and facilitators. Students must practice appropriate online etiquette and support each other in their learning | * Set expectations at the start of the teaching period. Explicitly advise students of University expectations around appropriate behaviour in online and face to face class environments.   LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES:   * [Online Netiquette (YouTube video)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXGBZQofN8U&list=PLZsIiam7ad3BNKll0LuEuI0Mo5T9KKaVm&index=1) * [Student Non-Academic Misconduct Policy](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/874790/Student_Non-Academic_Misconduct_Policy_v6.pdf) |
| Handling variable experiences with technology and dealing with ICT issues and questions. | You and/or students will sometimes experience poor network connectivity, hardware or software failure. | Students are able to complete tasks at hand or alternative tasks when experiencing ICT issues. | * In case of technical issues, where the room has a phone onsite, call ITSD for support directly on 5111 (external 9852 5111). * Technology and features of learning spaces (such as learning studios and Wi-Fi access) should be used to *support* learning, rather than being the focus of the learning activity itself. * Have a plan B (contingency plan) just in case technology based activities cannot be run (e.g. have a discussion around assessment, set a discussion topic or alternative activity that does not require technology.) * You should familiarise yourself with some different types of technology and trouble-shooting tools to gain confidence to know what to do when things don’t quite go to plan. This could include a range of APPs, games, in class engagement tools and learning space technologies (e.g. smart board and learning studios).   LINKS TO OTHER RESOURCES:   * [Link to IT service desk](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/information_technology_services/its/servicedesk) * [Link to FAQ and general issues around the use of vUWS and other IT issues at Western Sydney University](https://uws.service-now.com/Portal_pub/knowledge_home.do) * [Introduction to the learning studios (student orientation) video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U-rQw9Mnv0) * [Introduction to the learning studios (staff orientation) video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8w2VsRgyCwY) * [Services and facilities for current students – IT Resources](http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/currentstudents/current_students/services_and_facilities) |