Getting Started with Active Learning

According to Prince (2004), active learning is generally defined as “any instructional method that engages students in the learning process” by requiring students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing. At its core, active learning promotes student activity and engagement in the learning process. Here are four popular and time-effective active learning activities you can try with your students.

Think-Pair-Share (TPS)
This is a collaborative learning strategy in which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question. This simple activity can relieve the anxiety and mental block of being called on to answer a question in class. First, ask your students a meaningful open-ended question or pose a problem, then follow these steps:

1. **THINK:** Give your students a few minutes to ponder the question independently.
2. **PAIR:** Invite your students to discuss their answer with a nearby peer.
3. **SHARE:** Ask pairs to summarize and share their answers with the class.

One Minute Papers
You can use this strategy at the end of class or during any topic discussion to support and reinforce student learning and engagement with class content. Simply ask your students to write a short paper in response to the following questions:

1. What are the two central ideas or concepts you learned during this session?
2. What question(s) remain uppermost in your mind?
3. Is there anything you did not understand?

You can organize and sort your students’ short responses to help you target ideas or concepts where students might need additional help.

Four Corners
You can use this high-energy activity to introduce a new topic.

1. Write four questions on whiteboards or flip charts in each corner of the room.
2. Divide your students into four groups and send each group to a different corner.
3. Invite every student to write an answer to the question and discuss their responses with each other.
4. After a few minutes, ask the groups to move to the next question, read what is already there, and add any new responses they can think of.
5. Continue until all corners have been visited then convene a full-class discussion to consider the group’s collective answers.

Clarification Pauses
This technique fosters "active listening" skill development. After you state an important point or define a key concept, stop, and have the students get in groups of two. Have the pairs discuss and rework notes. Circulate around the room during these pauses to observe discussions and answer questions. Pausing to let material sink in has been shown to significantly increase learning when compared to lectures without the pauses.