

Fostering Engagement: Creating Connections

Connection and Relatedness

We know from Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017) that it is important for student motivation to create an atmosphere that results in students feeling a sense of:

- Belonging in their classes and/or chosen fields
- Ability to relate to content
- Value, community, and motivation



Setting Up Small Groups

Whether small groups are created in the classroom or online, the process begins the same — with appropriate grouping of students for the activity.

1. Identify the purpose of the activity and ensure each person has a task with clear expectations, and is accountable individually and collectively.
2. Provide protocols and structures to help ensure the group work moves along efficiently and with purpose by scaffolding the activity, creating milestone, or benchmark activities.

Strategies to Engage

Below are four activities that can be conducted face-to-face or online:



Speed Friending: A student-friendly spin-off of speed dating where students pair up for a certain amount of time (e.g., 30 seconds) to share information or answer a question, and then rotate.

Jigsaw: Students work in small groups to discuss a given topic before mixing up groups and teaching what they have learned to the new group. More information is [linked here](#).

Carousel: Students work in small groups, brainstorming about new topics or reviewing learned information, then move together from station to station to discuss different topics/questions as they go, usually in a set amount of time (e.g., 1 minute). Further description and suggestions can be found [linked here](#).

Think-Pair-Share: You pose a question to your students, provide them a few minutes to first think on their own, then ask students to share what they thought about with a partner, and then have students share to the whole class. More on implementation can be [found here](#).

Quick Ideas for Connecting with your Students



- Send an email reminder about an upcoming class and any pre-work or check in after class with those who did not attend – this can encourage students to attend and participate in class by adding this extra connection and accountability.
- Open your Zoom/WebEx session a few minutes before and after the class time. This gives time for students to chit chat, as they normally do when entering a meeting or classroom, ask questions, and share ideas with you and each other.
- Encourage back channel chat during sessions – this can help build peer-to-peer connection in class and students can feel more comfortable asking questions of their peers, working in groups, or sharing information with the entire class. If you are also in the chat channel, students can quickly and easily see responses to questions their peers have asked.
- Surveying your students for their interests and/or goals at the beginning of the semester and using their responses in class problems or examples – this demonstrates that you followed up on their interests and by providing something they are interested in or is relevant to their futures, they can understand the connection to your class more tangibly.
- Give time for students to reflect on concepts using ‘[silent conversations](#)’ (this linked example is specific to K-12 education, but can easily be used in college-level courses).
- Stop and take pauses from your content to enhance learning using [minute papers](#) or responding to [muddiest point](#) prompts.



For More Information, Support, and Ideas

- ✉ Contact our team: innovativelearningteam@purdue.edu
- 🌐 <https://www.purdue.edu/innovativelearning>
- 🌐 Teaching Tools: Active Learning while Physically Distancing: https://docs.google.com/document/d/15ZtTu2pmQRU_eC3gMcCvHvWDR57PDs4uxlMB7Bs1os8/edit?usp=sharing
- 🌐 K.P. Cross Academy: <https://kpcrossacademy.org/downloads/>
- 🌐 Liberating structures: <http://www.liberatingstructures.com/ls/>
- 🌐 PoRTAL: Purdue Repository for online Teaching and Learning (can be adapted for in-person): <https://www.purdue.edu/innovativelearning/supporting-instruction/portal/>