Engaging Students In The Learning Process

Pre-learning Activities

The following list may be used at any point in the “pre” session of learning or reading. All pre-reading or pre-reading activities are designed to help students develop levels of curiosity before they learn new material.

**Anticipation guide:** This can be in the form of a quiz or some other activity. The purpose is to lead students into the reading or learning by creating some questions in the students’ minds. Here is one example.

Instruction: Respond to each statement twice: once before the lesson and again after reading it.

- Write A if you agree with the statement
- Write B if you disagree with the statement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response before lesson</th>
<th>A statement from the lesson</th>
<th>Response after lesson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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**Bold print guess:** The teacher asks students to select a set number of bold print section headers or words found in the material. For each bold print word or section that the students find, the students write a one sentence prediction of what they think will be discussed in that section or with the term.

**Find It:** Students are given a list of vocabulary words or specific information that will be part of the learning experience. The words or list are placed on the left column of a two column note format. The students are then told to go find the page in a book where the word or information is found. The page number must be listed under the word or topic found in the left column. In the right column the student makes a guess of what the word means or how the information relates to the topic being studied. (Jim Penton, Gettysburg School District)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word or piece of information</th>
<th>Page where found</th>
<th>Guess the meaning or relationship:</th>
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<tbody>
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**Essential Question Posting:** The teacher places a thoughtful question in the front of the room prior to the start of a lesson. In Understanding By Design (2007), Wiggins and McTighe define essential questions as “questions that are not answerable with finality in a brief sentence… Their aim is to stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions — including thoughtful student questions — not just pat answers” (106). In order to think in terms of questions, “[i]nstead of thinking of content as something to be covered, consider knowledge and skill as the means of addressing questions central to understanding key issues in your subject” (107).

**Explore for Essential Question:** The teacher directs students to scan pictures of a specific reading assignment in a book, scan the text of a specific reading, scan a Power Point presentation quickly, or scan any type of material to be studied. After 30 second to one minute scan, students are placed in small groups to develop three questions about what they have seen. After composing the questions, the students orally state the questions as the teacher calls on individual groups. At some point the teacher determines that one of the questions is essential to the lesson. The teacher writes the question on the board and informs the class that it is the essential question for the lesson.

**Go Find:** The teacher assigns students to find an Internet document that includes information about an upcoming learning experience or topic. The teacher requires that the document includes certain specific pieces so that students cannot simply choose the first choice on the search. The teacher may require pictures, charts, graphs or some particular piece of information within the document that the students are supposed to find for the assignment. The objective is that students go out on their own and find information concerning a topic or concept to be learned. (Gary Fenton, Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center)

**Journal stimulation:** Students read a short journal or magazine article about the subject to be studied. The students use the information from the article as a stimulator to help them make connections as they read the curriculum material.

**K-W-L:** the “What do I Know”, “What do I Want to Know”, and “What Have I Learned” chart is designed to help students establish what they know and what they want to know to help them as they read. The teacher can use any method including the scan or the “look at” to have students to stimulate comments about what students know. A teacher could even just say “What do you know about …?” Then, the teacher would ask for responses. After the list of what is known is completed. Students then offer a list of what they want to know. The questions are listed in the middle section of the K-W-L chart shown below. Sometimes students are reluctant to ask questions so teachers may want to be creative with getting students to pose questions. For example, one technique is to have students look at all the pictures and then have the students list the “what do I want to know” first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I know</th>
<th>What do I want to know?</th>
<th>What have I learned and how will I remember?</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

After the reading the students complete this chart by listing what they know in the third column.
**K-W-L with a twist:** A creative teacher can supplement other ideas for the basic idea of traditional strategies. The concept below was developed to help with high school students who can be cynical about traditional K-W-L charts. The first step is to have students scan the material. Then ask students to list what they recognized while scanning. The second step is to have students scan again. Then ask students to list questions about what they have seen. After reading or after the during learning process, the students are asked to do the third step of listing what they have learned and write or draw how they will remember what they have learned. (Erie County Technical School)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did I see that I recognized?</th>
<th>What questions do I have?</th>
<th>What have I learned?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The K-W-L can be positively affected by creative twists that seem to work with high school students. Below is a second example of K-W-L with a twist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did you see that was familiar?</th>
<th>What will you learn or what questions do you have?</th>
<th>Write three sentences that tell the teacher what you now know.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Look for unknown words:** The teacher tells students to look at the pages and to write down any word that they do not know. The teacher gives students a brief amount of time because the intent is that students “look for” words and not read. The teacher then asks students to list words that they found. All words are placed on the board. The teacher tells students the meaning of some words. In the case of other words, the teacher tells students that there are ways to find the meaning as they read if they use context clues.

**Picture questioning:** The teacher shows a set of pictures that are found in the material to be learned or a set of pictures that relate to the material to be learned. When the teacher flashes each picture, students write a question that they have about the picture. The questions are then used for directed reading activities.

**The Turning Wheel:** Break students into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a large piece of paper which you’ve already written your units/chapters/etc. subtopics. Each group should have a different subtopic. Give each group 30 seconds to write down everything they know about the topic. Groups then pass the papers in the direction you organize. Groups have to continue adding to the new poster they receive but it has to be new information not already listed on the paper. After a couple of passes extend the time so that the groups have a little more time to discuss. (I didn’t go pass 1 min 30 sec). Continue passing the papers for about 5 more min. and make sure the last pass is back to the original group. The original group should then discuss all the statements on the paper and then circle the three statements that are most essential, most important, or most fundamental to the topic, (this will help them evaluate and make decisions). From this write the statements on the board and discuss each poster. Ask the students why they choose those topics and why it would be important to the lesson or topics. Once each poster is completed have the students write the statements in their note books.
Novel or Book as Backdrop to Learning: Many times content material learning can be stimulated by reading about how this content is part of real life. Some teachers use a novel or book as a backdrop to learning content. For example, one nursing program uses a book called Losing My Mind as a backdrop for learning about Alzheimers patients. (Linda Hoover, Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center) Here are other examples:

- **Food/Culinary Arts:**
  - “Clover” by Dori Sanders
  - “Hope was Here” by Joan Bauer

- **Health Care:**
  - “Mountains Beyond Mountains” by Tracy Kidder
  - “Peeling the Onion” by Wendy Orr
  - “Still Alice” by Lisa Genova

- **Business:**
  - “Nickel and Dimed” by Barbara Ehrenreich

- **Automotive:**
  - “The Art of Racing in the Rain” by Garth Stein

- **Cosmetology:**
  - “Beauty Shop for Rent…fully equipped, inquire within” by Laura Bowers

- **Veterinary Assistant:**
  - “All Creatures Great and Small”, by James Herriot
  - “The Choice” by Nicolas Sparks

- **Horticulture:**
  - “Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer” by Novella Carpenter

**Picture walk:** Have students look through pages of what they are reading and tell students to write questions that they have about pictures. These questions could be used as part of a K-W-L chart or the questions could be used for the directed reading while students read.

**Quick look:** The students are given a set amount of time and then are told to look at each page that they will read. The students are reminded not to read, but to look at the pages. When finished, the teacher tells students to close all material so they cannot see it. The teacher then asks students to give quick “gut responses” to what they saw. The teacher lists the responses on a board or paper in front of the class.

**Read the questions at the end of the chapter:** Prior to any reading, the students go to questions at the end of a chapter. The students read the questions to help stimulate their thinking about material in the reading material.

**Read the summary information first:** The teacher directs the students to the summary. The students read the summary and respond. They may be asked to develop questions or compose statements of their thoughts about the summary.
Scan the lines: Have students place a straight edge under words and slide through all the material to be read. A time limit should be established so that students recognize the need to scan as opposed to read. After the scan, the students should close the reading material and the teacher asks students to quickly respond with concepts that they see.

Scavenger hunt: The teacher develops a hunt for pictures, specific areas of the material, important words. The teacher then has the students find the information requested as part of the hunt. This activity helps students search through material prior to reading.

Vocabulary illumination: The teacher identifies words that students may not know. The teacher either lists the words and tells students what the words mean or the teacher mentions the words and tells students what the words mean.

Vocabulary by accident: The teacher posts words on a wall, on a bulletin board, or hanging from the ceiling two to three weeks prior to these words being used in content. The teacher does not personally bring attention to the words. Instead, students see the words and become familiar with them. If students ask about a word or words, the teacher will say the word properly, but the teacher will simply tell the students that the words will be used in the future, and he/she will focus on the word when it will be used. Surprisingly, students quite frequently will begin to study information about the word prior to the word being used in class.

Vocabulary with 3rd column symbol: The teacher will provide students with a three column chart as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Guess the meaning</th>
<th>Draw a symbol that gives you a mental picture of the word.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Word (page)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Word (page)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Word (page)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are given a list of words for the left column with a page number of where the word can be found in context. The students are given the opportunity to find the words and read the contextual usage of the word. Students then write a guess of what the word means in the middle column and then draw a symbol of what they pictured when they saw the word in context.

Vocabulary with Graphics: The teacher asks students to look up a meaning for a word or term. The student is then asked to develop a phrase that defines the word. The student then finds a picture or draws a picture that can be attached to the phrase. Then, the student makes a poster of the word, the phrase, and the picture.
During-learning Activities

The following list may be used at any point in the “during” session of learning or reading. All during-reading or during-learning activities are designed to help students search for information, connect information, and be engaged in processing while reading or learning.

**Checking for Comparative Knowledge:** First students must read a document that gives them some information. During reading, the students use some form of two column notes to list what they learn. Next the students watch a video and they check each piece of information that they read as they see and hear it in the video. This strategy could work by viewing the video first, make notes, then read and check off like information as the reading is done.

**Cornell Notes:** Also known as two column notes, this involves creating notes via two columns of information. One column includes topics. The column adjacent to the topic is the place where notes about the topic are placed. These can be teacher directed with guidance or students can be expected to do them on their own.

**Directed reading or learning questions:** These are questions designed to lead students directly to information that the teacher wants the students to find. The questions are also designed to lead students to think about certain connections as they read or learn. The questions should be read orally prior to starting the reading or learning. Students may answer questions as they read or learn, or the students may answer after reading or learning.

**Jigsaw reading:** The teachers assigns chunks of reading to a small group. The group reads then makes a list of what they have learned. Then the teacher leads each group in reporting to the class what they have learned. When all reports are completed, the students write a summary of what was included in the total reading.

**Read, listen, share, and question in a small group:** The teacher divides a class into small groups. Each group has a volunteer or assigned reader. The reader reads aloud for the group until the teacher tells the readers to stop. When the reader stops, each student in the group must state one thing that he/she remembers from the reading. Then the group must develop one question related to what was read. (Linda Hoover, Susquehanna County Career and Technology Center)

**Naming the symbols and numbers:** Teachers require students to provide names of symbols of terms or numbers when they are found. For example when reading a stated math or science formula, the student must use words to say what the number represents or the symbol represents. Instead of saying \(a^2 + b^2 = c^2\), the student says the distance along the one end wall is squared then added to the square of the distance of the side wall.

**Oral reading:** Oral reading is used very selectively in this model. Students are told to read aloud to themselves if they are having difficulty understanding what they read, but they are seldom if ever told to read orally to the class. On the other hand, the teacher may
read select brief passages orally. As soon as they have been read, the students are directed to write questions or to write a summary.

**Process finding**: Students are given a graphic organizer with numbered steps like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

After each step of the process that students are learning, the students write the name of the step. This could be enhanced by having students write some detail about each step.

**Questioning while reading**: Teachers ask students to develop questions as they read. The teachers may present graphic organizers that provide organization for the questions. A sample of a question form is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Page where you thought of question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The teacher can also give students sticky tabs and ask students to write questions on the tabs. After the questions are written on the tabs, the students can place them in the book on the appropriate pages or on a certain spot on the wall in the classroom.

**Question aloud**: The teacher must model this concept. As the student reads, hears, or sees information, the student says out loud about what they think. In other words, students are given permission to talk to themselves while learning.

**Read then predict**: Students read a passage then stop to make a prediction about what they will read.

**Reciprocal Teaching**: The teacher assigns students particular roles when reading or learning. Examples of what happens could include one student being asked specifically to find information on one concept or set of facts. Another student is asked specifically to define a process found in the information. Another student may be asked to find unfamiliar words and report those words with definitions. Later the three different concepts are reported out to the entire class.

**Silent Timed Reading**: The teacher assigns a brief reading and informs students to read for an assigned short period of time. The teacher hands student a sheet that looks like the one below prior to assigning the reading. After students have completed the reading time, the teacher says “Stop”. At this juncture, the teacher tells students to write three sentences directly related to what the students have just read.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pages or page read.</th>
<th>Three sentences related to what was read.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Small Group Oral Reading/Questioning:** One student reads to a small group of students. The teacher tells the student to stop. The small group asks the reading student to answer questions that they have developed about what they heard.

**Think aloud:** This strategy clearly must be modeled by the teacher. As the student reads, hears, or sees information, the student says out loud about what he/she thinks. Obviously, there must be a structure established with students as to how loudly they can talk.

**TV Screen for Thoughts:** Have students cut a rectangle out a piece of paper. Tell the students to place the rectangle over a set of words found on a page. Say that it should look like the words are on a TV screen. As students read the passage, they should write one question that they have about the reading. They should also write one note about something that they could explain to the class.

**Using graphic organizers for notes:** This model exposes students to varied graphic organizers that can help students develop notes and organized thinking while reading, listening, or watching. Teachers should be cautious to name the graphic organizer as a Venn Diagram, a K-W-L chart, a mind map, or some other formal name of the organizer. If the teacher simply calls it a “graphic organizer”, students begin to become resistant to the term and become negative about the value of the graphic. Graphic organizers should be used as a note taking tool and therefore should be maintained in student notebooks.
Post-learning Activities

The following list may be used at any point in the “post” session of reading or learning. All post-reading or post-reading activities are designed to help students develop levels of comprehension after they discover new material.

**Checklist of facts:** The teacher presents students with a checklist of facts from the reading or lesson. Have the students check those items that they are sure they could explain the next day.

**Create a story:** An electronics teacher who was having difficulty with his students understanding the concept of electrical flow decided to use this strategy. He introduced the concepts of electrons, protons, neutrons, current, and flow. He then presented a scenario of three characters playing by a river. He told students to write a story using the electrical concepts that they had learned about the characters and the river.

**Create a tutorial:** The teacher tells students to use nothing but their Cornell notes to create a step by step tutorial on how to do something. Students then exchange papers and review their fellow student’s tutorial to their own Cornell notes. Then, students compare/contrast the information with each other.

**Develop tomorrow’s quiz:** Students write several questions that the teacher uses in a quiz the next day.

**Demonstrate what was learned:** Students are taken to a station and asked to demonstrate what they have learned immediately following reading, listening, or viewing. The students may use written notes as they perform.

**Essential Question Reflection:** Following a lesson, the students use the lesson’s essential question as a prompt for writing a summary or listing a set number of key points about the question. Another possible strategy would be to have students *Compose a Question Still Unanswered* about the Essential Question.

**Exit slips of learning:** Students list three things that they learned and hand them to teacher as they leave the classroom.

**Exit slips of questions:** Students list two questions about what they do not understand and hand them to the teacher when leaving the room.

**Focus Free Writing:** The John Collins writing method provides the opportunity for students to write all they can about what they want to write in a set period of time. The teacher says: “Your pen, pencil, keyboard should continue moving from the time I tell you to start until I tell you to stop. Write everything that you can about what you have learned today. Try to use sentences. Do not stop writing until I tell you to stop.”

**Fill in the process steps:** The teacher gives students a graphic organizer that has steps written in certain areas. The students are asked to fill in the other blank steps.
**Picture This**: Students read material and then complete the following during a class period. The teacher explains the assignment:

The assignment will turned in at departure from the class:
1. Divide an 11”x14” sheet of paper into four equal parts.
2. Choose four ideas that you can envision from what you have just read. Illustrate each of the four ideas in a separate square on your paper. Be sure to be neat, concise, appropriate and realistic as you bring your ideas to life on paper.
3. Label each sentence with a one or two sentence caption.

**Process listing**: Students list the steps of a process that has been included in the lesson. The students are told not to be concerned with exact order or the total steps. Instead, students are told to list what they can remember.

**Spot Not**: Students are given a reading assignment. This reading can occur in class or outside of class. If the assignment is outside of class, the teacher could use the “spot not” as a quick bell ringer activity with assessment implications. If the reading assignment is completed in class, the teacher can implement this as a strategy for immediate post reading activity. The teacher compiles lists of four statements. Three of the statements are clearly correct statements from the reading assignment. One of statements is incorrect. The students spot the statement that is not correct and mark it as such. (Joe Luther, Central PA Institute of Science and Technology)

**Steps defining**: Students are given a graphic organizer to list steps as they remember them in the order that they think they should happen. An example is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
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<td>Step 5</td>
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</table>

**Sticky tab board**: During the lesson, students write questions on sticky tabs. At the end of class, they place the questions on a board placed in the room.

**Summary statements**: Students write a summary of what they have learned. The teacher can help student early in the year with graphic organizers like the one below.

| Today, we read about __________________________. The reading presented three points that are essential to the concept. The first point was_________________________. The second point emphasized how ________________________________. The third essential point explained that_______________________________. |   |
**Test question list**: At the end of the experience, each student writes three questions that may appear on a test. The teacher assures students that at least a specified portion of the test will contain questions derived from the content of student questions.

**What are three things that you learned?**: The students write three sentences that state something they have learned in the reading or instruction.

**Writing journals**: These can be used in varied ways. The concept is that students compose sentences, paragraphs, or questions about what was learned on a particular day. The students are expected to keep the journals in an organized booklet and are expected to write something in relation to each day of learning. Some teachers will substitute writing with a drawing or graphic organizer on a respective day.

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**Other Activities Used Primarily in Elementary Schools**

-Readers Workshop
-Interactive Read Aloud
-Shared Reading
-Guided Reading
-Independent Reading
-Language experience approach
-Regular use of classroom and school library
-Writing workshop
-Shared writing
-Interactive writing

-Independent writing
-Journal writing
-Readers theater
-Plays
-Show and tell
-Audio books
-Presentations
-Interactive read alouds
-Conferring
-Look for unknown words
-Word Wall

Preview the vocabulary presented and terminology presented in the text
Questioning while reading
Sticky tab notes/unknown words
Use context clues while reading or listening