

3.5 Asynchronous Student Engagement Activities



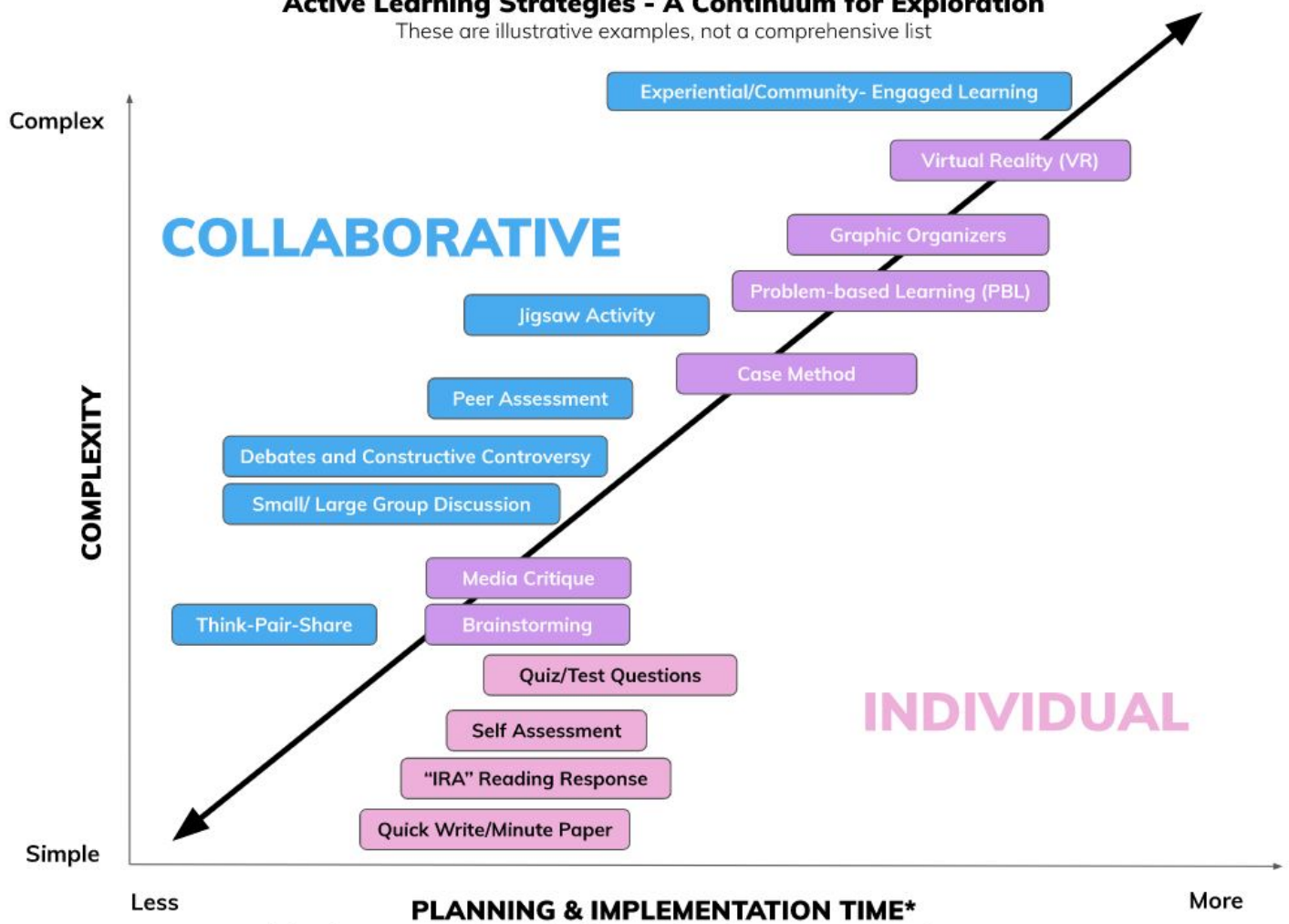
Regardless of delivery modality, building activities that encourage students to be actively engaged in the learning process is crucial. Active learning comprises a wide range of activities that are defined as “any instructional method that engages students in the learning process. In short, active learning requires students to do meaningful learning activities and think about what they are doing” (Prince, 2004). Active learning activities can engage students in various ways by:

- reading, thinking and speaking critically
- expressing ideas through writing
- examining personal attitudes and values
- giving and receiving feedback
- reflecting on the learning process

The following continuum outlines the kinds of activities that encourage active learning, by level of complexity and whether the activity is individual or collaborative:

Active Learning Strategies - A Continuum for Exploration

These are illustrative examples, not a comprehensive list



*The larger your class, the longer the planning and implementation time

If you'd like to learn more about the activities referenced in the continuum, [this resource](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vRfB8b0HSFpqp7pDjXbcb4z3Or9rJ9AcxFX7rzArWyRo8WONGCwOwos8AY5WYsXhYWoGUIQat2KXp_D/pub?start=false&loop=false&delayms=3000&slide=id.p) (https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/e/2PACX-1vRfB8b0HSFpqp7pDjXbcb4z3Or9rJ9AcxFX7rzArWyRo8WONGCwOwos8AY5WYsXhYWoGUIQat2KXp_D/pub?start=false&loop=false&delayms=3000&slide=id.p) (where the continuum was copied from) outlines each in detail. They're not explicitly tied to online teaching, but the approaches can be adapted to the online context.

Note: the following content has been adapted from the [ABC Learning project](https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/abc-ld/) (<https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/abc-ld/>) at University College London (UCL). This model developed at UCL breaks online learning activities down by the type of learning, or goal of the learning: acquisition, investigation, collaboration, and practice.

Acquisition

Learning through acquisition is what learners are doing when they are listening to a lecture or podcast, reading from books or websites, and watching demos or videos. Providing a **variety of**

ways for students to access content & learn through acquisition will not only make the course more interesting, but it will also help with accessibility. Below we have outlined some of the ways you can provide students with access to relevant content (note: there are tons of options that are discipline-specific that we haven't delved into here, but it's worth taking some time to research creative ways that instructors in your discipline have been sharing content). Regardless of the kinds of content you select for your course, consider how you will have students engage with it; think about the function the content is serving in the course, and how it is helping to feed into students' development toward the course learning outcomes. This is why, in a backward design model, it's helpful to think through your assessment plan prior to considering content and activities - it enables you to think critically about what content will be most helpful for students, and what might be superfluous or unnecessary.

Types of asynchronous activities might include:

- **traditional readings** (book chapters, articles, etc.) - it may be possible to upload some readings as files in Quercus and embed them directly into modules, making it easy to assign them as pre-work, then have students move directly into a discussion, or a short quiz to check for understanding, etc.
- **lecturettes** - we recommend breaking traditional lectures into small, 5-10 minute lecturettes which are much more manageable for students to watch.
- **viewing multimedia & websites**
- **listening to podcasts, webcasts**
- **watching animations, videos**

Links to all of the above can be embedded within pages in Quercus, similar to what we have done throughout this course, making it easy to organize concepts within modules, and integrate acquisition-based activities with activities that require more active learning.

Checks for Understanding

As part of the acquisition process, you can leverage online tools to gauge students' level of understanding of the course concepts, and use that information as an opportunity to provide further clarity as needed. Types of asynchronous activities might include:

- **Quizzes** (<https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/46670/pages/assessments#quizzes>)- you can use low-stakes or ungraded quizzes throughout the course to assess students' comprehension of concepts from a reading or video
- **Discussion** (<https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/46670/pages/discussions>)- asking students to pose a question or make a comment after an acquisition activity can give you a quick sense of where they're at (e.g. have them indicate the 'muddiest point' from a podcast they were assigned to listen to)

Investigation

Learning through investigation guides the learner to explore, compare and critique the texts, documents and resources that reflect the concepts and ideas being taught. Just as we ask students to seek out information and analyze texts, etc. in our face-to-face courses, we can replicate that activity in an online environment. As with acquisition-based learning, it's important to consider the 'product' of the investigation - will students connect ideas together in a quiz? Can they co-create a wiki with other students? (More on this below). Can they share their findings in a discussion forum? Consider how to connect this style of learning to other forms of active engagement in the course.

Types of asynchronous activities might include:

- **using digital tools to collect and analyse data** - the specific tools and nature of how this work would unfold is discipline-specific, but this is a useful exercise you can have students work through to improve their comprehension; as with quizzes, this does not need to be a graded or high-stakes activity.
- **comparing digital texts** - just as you might have students analyze a variety of materials in class, you can have them engage in similar activities using digital texts or other media
- **seeking digital content that has relevance to a course concept/module** - this might take the form of sharing news articles relevant to the course content in a discussion, or a resource-building activity with peers, etc.

Collaboration

Learning through discussion and collaboration requires the learner to articulate their ideas and questions, and to challenge and respond to the ideas and questions from the teacher, and/or from their peers. Collaboration embraces socially constructed practice, and it is about taking part in the process of knowledge building with peers. Providing opportunities for students to meaningfully connect with one another in a way that contributes to significant learning is critical in an online course.

Types of asynchronous activities might include:

- **discussion forums** (as we covered in the previous section)
 - **wikis** - co-edited web pages where students can build content together or compile resources (which you can create in Quercus using Pages, as we did in the example at the beginning of this module)
 - **collaborative documents** - creating a shared document in [OneDrive](https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/46670/pages/integration-office-365) (<https://q.utoronto.ca/courses/46670/pages/integration-office-365>) which could be used for assignments, but also for note-taking, study groups, tutorial work, etc.
 - **narrated PPTs** - students can contribute and narrate different sections at different times to generate a recorded presentation
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Practice

Learning through practice enables the learner to adapt their actions to the task goal, and use the feedback to improve their next action. Feedback may come from self-reflection, from peers, from the teacher, or from the activity itself, if it shows them how to improve the result of their action in relation to the goal.

Types of asynchronous activities might include:

- using models
 - simulations
 - virtual labs (we address virtual labs as a specialized course format in the next module)
 - virtual field trips
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Examples of Online Activities

The application of all of these approaches can take numerous forms, some of which are outlined in this collaborative chart "[Active Learning While Physically Distancing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/15ZtTu2pmQRU_eC3gMccVhVwDR57PDs4uxIMB7Bs1os8/edit)" (https://docs.google.com/document/d/15ZtTu2pmQRU_eC3gMccVhVwDR57PDs4uxIMB7Bs1os8/edit) developed by Louisiana State University. We encourage you to continue to add to our course wiki, located near the beginning of this module, and draw on one another's experiences to help grow your arsenal of activity ideas.
