

Best Practices for Teaching in Active Learning Classrooms

Over the past two quarters, we have been asking Active Learning Classroom instructors to share the pedagogical strategies and teaching practices that work in the [Odegaard Library Active Learning Classrooms](#). Thanks to all of the instructors that have shared their insights and opened up their classrooms for observation so far. The following are some of the ALC teaching best practices that have emerged.

What works: orienting students to learning in the ALCs

- Create low-stakes activities during the first week of class to orient students to using ALC room features as part of class time.
 - Start class by posing a question at the table monitors on a PowerPoint slide or your Canvas course site and have tables or small groups discuss.
 - Ask tables to brainstorm responses to a course-related question, brainstorm research topics, or draw models / figures at the writable walls and rolling whiteboards.
 - Ask students to bring in a laptop or device to class and practice connecting their device to a table monitor via one of the three table inputs. Students can display course-related content to the table, such as news articles, images, scholarly works, data or graphs, etc.
 - Encourage students early on to move their chairs.

What works: ALC mini-lectures and the instructor podium

- Use the Lavalier Mic while lecturing so that you can walk around the classroom.
- If you want to have the whole class facing you during a mini-lecture, ask students to move their chairs and convene in the central open area. You may wish to use a writable wall or rolling whiteboard to illustrate the lecture.
- ALC tools enable instructors to roam while presenting and not be tethered to the instructor podium:
 - The PowerPoint presentation remote enables you to move around the room and can help assess student comprehension.
 - The iPad minis mirror the Instructor Podium Crestron screen so that you can control content on the monitors from anywhere in the room (the iPads are available at the Entry Desk for instructor check out).

What works: round tables and student groups - round tables accommodate nine students with flat-panel monitors and mics

What works: round tables

- Microphones at each student table are essential for effective large class discussion. Use of the mics enables all students to hear student questions, ideas and presentations.
 - When a student asks or answers a question during a whole-class discussion, it is easiest to have someone sitting next to the student turn on the table mic for them.
- Students need practice connecting their devices to the monitor at the table and choosing which input to display. Create low-stakes exercises or activities that have students share their work on the monitor in small groups at each table.

- Instructors should convey to students that they are responsible for the learning environment at their table:
 - Students should move their chairs to see instructors, presenters and content.
 - Students should ensure that their belongings are out of the way and don't impede movement.
 - Students may use the instructor call button at their table if they have questions.

What works: group work

- Intentional group design optimizes the potential for student engagement:
 - There are several options to create groups: you can use Canvas to randomly assign students to small groups; have students do a short self-assessment survey (on learning styles, etc.) before class and assign groups with a mix of students; have students self-select groups.
 - Consider changing group composition at least once during the quarter, if not more frequently. This enables students to become comfortable working in small groups, yet allows them to engage with more students in the class over the course of the quarter.
 - Creating student roles within a student group encourages active participation from all members. Roles may include: recorder, reporter, facilitator/moderator, timekeeper, etc.

What works: writable surfaces and whiteboards

- The writable surfaces foster kinetic learning and keeps students moving and active.
- Have small groups brainstorm topics or work on problems on the writable surfaces; to save their work, students can take pictures of their work and post them to the course website.
- For large group discussions, have a student volunteer capture the group discussion on one of the large writable surfaces; to record the discussion, take a picture of the class notes.

Amanda Hornby and Louise Richards, Odegaard Library