Active learning strategies

Have you ever struggled to concentrate or felt unmotivated by your studies? You’re not alone! Research shows that active learning can help students to achieve a far deeper understanding of a topic than by simply listening to lectures or reading textbooks.

Active learning means you actively participate in your learning. For example, by asking questions about what you’re reading, discussing your learning with other students, thinking about how what you’re learning contributes to what you already understand, evaluating your own work, and any other approach that engages you with what you’re learning.

We all have different preferences for learning – think about what active learning strategies suit you best.

Look at the list of various active learning techniques overleaf:
✓ Tick strategies that you already use
★ Star any strategies that you’d like to try

Resources
For more help with active learning strategies, visit the Skills Hub website or come to a workshop.
www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub
Reflect on your learning

- Keep a journal to reflect on things you’ve learnt
- Evaluate your own work and identify topics you need to prioritise
- Reflect on your feedback, both the positive points and those you need to improve – repeat the former, try to change the latter!

Link ideas

- Find links between what you’re learning and examples from your work experience or daily life
- Apply what you have learnt to three real life situations. Work out which is the best example
- Write key points of what you’re learning on Post-it notes. Rearrange them to show different ways to organise and link the information
- Make a wallchart, spider diagram or mind map linking what you have learnt about a topic. Think about how it links to other topics you’ve studied

Make it visual

- Draw a simple picture or symbol to remind you of each of the key points of what you’re studying
- Summarise a theory or concept visually using cartoons or diagrams
- Make spider diagrams, mind maps and other visual notes

Identify key points

- Sum up the three most important points of a lecture or piece of reading. What is the most important point? (If you find yourself highlighting everything, this will help you to identify the author/lecture’s main message)
- List all the key points of one aspect of your study
- If you’re struggling to focus on your reading, try summarising things you read in 8–12 words

Ask yourself questions

- Create a list of titles for essays and reports on a subject. Take five minutes to write an outline plan for one of them
- List 20 short questions about what you’re studying (e.g. what, when, who where, why, how etc.) see example questions on the critical reading guide
- Answer your 20 short questions
- Play devil’s advocate. Imagine you disagree with what you’re reading. What evidence and examples could you use to argue against it?

Discuss with others

- Discuss your ideas and difficulties with your studies with other people
- Contribute to your module forum or message board, if there’s not one, set one up
- Teach things you have learnt to a real or imaginary person

Other active learning strategies that work for you: