

Strategies for Engaging Students in a Virtual Environment

Facilitation plays a pivotal role in creating a classroom rich with academic discourse. It can be tricky to do in a virtual classroom, but it is important. Virtual discourse will take an additional amount of time as students share, read, type, and respond to their classmates. Below are some strategies for engaging students in a virtual environment.

Chat Burst - Chat bursts allow for the whole class to share their thinking at the same time rather than only a few students sharing either in the chat or on camera. Have students respond to a question or problem in the chat. Students WAIT to press “send” in the chat until the teacher gives the signal to share. When the teacher gives the signal, students send their response. Ask students to take a minute to read through the responses. Have students read the chat and select a response they want to discuss. Allow a few people to share and discuss the responses they selected from the chat. The teacher can highlight responses that are common or move forward the work of the lesson.

My Turn, Your Turn: When introducing a topic to the class, divide students in half for whole group conversation or pair them up in breakout groups. Have $\frac{1}{2}$ of the students tell you what they know about the topic while the others actively listen. You may want to set a timer. When time is up have the other $\frac{1}{2}$ of the students tell you the questions they have about the topic while the rest actively listen. Once both groups have shared, discuss any further points on the topic.

#Hashtag Summary: Following a lesson or discussion have students reflect and come up with one to two words to summarize what they learned, a connection they made, or a key takeaway. Students will represent the word(s) as a hashtag.

Movie Title: Following a lesson or discussion have students summarize their learning in the name of a movie title.

Popcorn Share - The teacher poses a question and calls on a student to unmute and share. That student answers and then picks another student to pass it to. That student answers and picks another and they continue popcorning around answering questions, adding thoughts, and responding to their classmates. This works well with short responses so the sharing is a quick burst like popcorn popping.

Daily Sign In: Post a question in the chat at the beginning of class. Have students respond to the question as soon as they enter class.

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Think - Pair - Share - This popular discussion protocol works well in a virtual environment.

- Think: Teacher asks questions and provides individual think time for students.
- Pair: Students are paired to share their thinking on a Google Slide with an assigned partner.
 - Using the chat feature, the teacher can share the link to the Google Slides. Students open the slides and find the slide with their name. Be sure that the link is set so anyone with the link can edit.
 - Students can type their responses while reading the response of their partner on the slide. Students can also include pictures of their work on the slide.
 - This can also be done by placing students in breakout groups.
- Share: Whole class sharing of ideas by returning to a class discussion.
 - Another option is to use the “Comment” feature in Google Slides. Students can review the slides of other pairs and comment on their ideas. To prevent students from continuing to edit the work, the sharing privileges for the link can be changed from “Anyone can edit” to “Anyone can comment”.

Notice/Wonder - This discussion protocol is often used to begin a lesson and then used throughout the lesson as a framework for student-centered conversation.

- Ask “What do you notice?” and “What do you wonder?” as open-ended questions. These questions allow students to share their thinking and the teacher has a window into students’ prior knowledge and schema. It is important to honor students’ thinking so accept all answers (even if they do not appear directly related to the way you are thinking about the problem). If possible, collect students’ thinking in a shared document.
- As a community, determine the mathematical question you wish to explore. In this example, you might decide to explore which circles can be used to make $9/5$.

Clock Buddies - Give students a Clock Buddy template. Have students write down a classmate’s name for each time on the clock. Make sure each student writes one another’s name on the same spot of their respective clocks. (i.e. If Carrie writes down Leo’s name at 2:00, Leo should write down Carrie’s name at 2:00). Assign students to private chat or go to a breakout room with their 4:00 Clock Buddy, etc.

I Wonder: Before learning a new topic or in the middle of a topic, put students in pairs or small groups in a breakout room. Have students discuss what they still wonder about/have questions about. Have groups share out in the big group and look for common misconceptions and questions.

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Say Something: While students are working on a problem or assignment, suddenly say, “Say Something!” Ask students to unmute and comment on the problem, ask a question, etc. Have students get back to work and repeat after they work a little longer.

Write Something: While students are working on a problem or during a discussion where you want to hear from all students, suddenly say, “Write something!” Ask students to write into the chat a comment, question, or contribution to the conversation. Repeat periodically.

Turn & Talk - Students turn to talk in pairs by private chatting with an assigned classmate or discussing in small breakout groups. Another option is to have the students private chat with the teacher.

- They might share something they are wondering or an idea about how to begin the problem solving process.
- In a virtual environment, you can use breakout rooms to provide students with time to turn & talk. Keep the time short while students are learning this routine - perhaps 90 seconds or less. This will keep students focused on the question you’ve asked them to answer.
- This can be an opportunity to engage students in making connections and/or using reasoning & proof by asking them to justify their thinking to their partner.

Three Reads - Engage students in sense making during problem solving by reading the word problem or question three times in order to make sense of it.

- First read: Understand the context of the story. What is the big idea about what is happening?
- Second read: Identify the quantities that are given in the story.
- Third read: What mathematical questions could we explore? Or, what question is being asked? How might we work to find an answer?

Show Us How you Feel: Have students use the emojis available in the meeting platform to share their reaction to a question or statement.

Reaction Action: Give students a printout of a “!”, a “?” and a speech bubble. Encourage students to hold up the appropriate card to react to the class conversation. The “!” indicates an “a-ha” moment, or something they hadn’t thought of before. The “?” indicates they have a question. The speech bubble indicates they have something to say.

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Word of the Day: Tell students before a lesson begins that when they hear the Word of the Day, they should make one of the chosen motions for everyone to see (i.e. jazz hands, round of applause, thumbs up, dance moves, etc.). Make the Word of the Day related to the vocabulary of the lesson.

Anticipation Guide: Pose a statement to students before class begins and ask them to write down whether they agree or disagree and why. Explain that they revisit the same statement at the end of class and see if their thinking has changed.

Our Google Doc: Open and share a Google doc with the class that students can add to during the discussion.

True or False: Pose different questions and have students simply type a “T” or “F” in the chat box. Use the students’ answers as a starting point for a discussion.

Show and Tell: Have students bring an object with them to the virtual class and display it so it can be seen by the other students. Occasionally, ask a student to unmute and tell about their object and why they chose to bring it to class.

Google Doc Review: Put students into small groups and have them look at the first Google doc, discuss the question and record their thinking. Then have groups move to the next Google doc, read the response from the first group and discuss, and then add their group’s response to the Google doc. Repeat with as many Google docs as needed to review a topic.

Chat and Chew: Invite students to bring their lunch to a scheduled discussion group. Post a question or problem on the screen as students arrive and encourage them to share their thinking as they eat.

Bring a Buddy: Have younger students bring their favorite stuffed animal or action figure to class. Have students “Turn and Talk” to their buddy and then share their discussion with the class.

Scavenger Hunt: Set a timer and ask students to go and find objects that match a given clue or go with the topic you are teaching them (e.g. Bring back an object that is shaped like a cylinder! Bring back 5 small objects.).

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Class Cheers: Teach students simple cheers that you can do together as a class to reward hard work and good thinking. Have students all unmute and do the cheer together to celebrate.

What's Your Strategy?: Have students solve a math problem and then create a short video to share their strategy. Have students watch the videos and choose their favorite strategy and explain why they like it.