101 Increasing Interactivity in Virtual Classrooms

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Find the Spectrum of Solutions

Increasing Interactivity in Virtual Classroom

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An increasing number of our clients ask us to deliver training workshops as webinars instead of face-to-face sessions. They have apparently arrived at this objective decision by applying a single criterion: reducing costs. Our clients are also satisfied with talking head sessions (minus the talking head) that use a barrage of PowerPoint slides to dump data. However, we feel guilty about this approach since it's the adult equivalent of taking candy out a baby's mouth. So we have been experimenting with increasing interactivity in our virtual classrooms as an approach to improving instructional effectiveness. We "ported" several interactive classroom strategies, dropped some of them, and adapted the others to leverage the online environment.

Here's our list of 25 strategies. Remember, we are training designers and not technology gurus. Hence these approaches are platform-agnostic and use the commonest webinar features.

1. ***Assessment-Based Learning Activities (ABLA)*** requires participants to complete an online test, a rating scale, or a questionnaire and score their own performance. In the test-first approach, the facilitator focuses on the items that were missed by the participants.

2. ***Brain-Pick Activity.*** This activity involves four or five "informants" who have significant experience and expertise in the training topic. The participants are divided into as many teams as there are informants and assigned to separate breakout rooms. The informants rotate around the rooms where they are interviewed by the team members. At the end of the interviews, each team prepares and presents a summary of what they learned from the informants.

3. ***Case Method*** begins with an audio or text display of a real or fictional scenario surrounding a problem. By typing text messages, the participants analyze, discuss, make decisions, and apply concepts and principles associated with the case. The facilitator adds additional insights and removes any misconceptions.

4. ***Closers*** are activities conducted near the end of the online learning session. They use interactive discussions for reviewing main points, tying up loose ends, planning application activities, providing feedback, celebrating successful conclusions, and exchanging information for future contacts.

5. ***Consensus Decisionmaking Activities*** involve a list of items (usually 10) to be arranged in order of priority. Participants send text messages to each other and then reach consensus. The facilitator presents priority rankings from an expert and invites participants to discuss any differences.

6. ***Debriefing Activities*** are used for encouraging reflection and dialogue about an earlier experience from the workplace or a training activity (such as *a roleplay or a simulation game*). These activities involve processing of the common experience through a type-chat discussion to extract key learning points from it. They encourage participants to identify

and express their feelings, recall events and decisions, share the lessons they learned, relate insights to other real-world events, speculate on how things could have been different, and plan for future action.

7. ***Double Exposure Activities*** present training videos or audio recordings. The participants watch a segment or listen to a segment and then interact with each other through type-chat discussions to review and apply the new concepts and skills.

8. ***Graphics Games*** involve photographs, paintings, drawings, or cartoons as an essential element. Some graphic games require participants to create these graphics. In other games, the participants review the graphic, analyze its elements, discover relationships, and discuss their findings.

9. ***Improv Games*** increase the participants' fluency with concepts and terms. Most improv games require the participants to type-chat responses to open questions, recall key information and think creatively and spontaneously.

10. ***Instructional Puzzles*** challenge the participant's ingenuity and incorporate training content that is to be previewed, reviewed, tested, re-taught, or enriched. They can also be used to train people on different types of thinking skills.

11. ***Interactive Lectures*** involve participants in the learning process while providing complete control to the online facilitator. These activities enable a quick and easy conversion of a passive presentation into an interactive experience. Different types of interactive lectures incorporate built-in quizzes, interspersed tasks, teamwork interludes, and participant control of the presentation.

12. ***Interactive Storytelling*** involves fictional narratives in a variety of forms. Participants may listen to a story and make appropriate decisions at critical junctures. They may also create and share stories that illustrate key concepts, steps, or principles related the instructional objective.

13. ***Item Processing*** activities begin with a display of guidelines, principles, facts, questions, or suggestions. By text-chatting with each other, the participants organize these items into appropriate categories.

14. ***Jolts*** lull participants into behaving in a comfortable way and deliver a powerful wake-up call. They force participants to re-examine their assumptions and revise their standard procedures. Online jolts typically last for a few minutes but provide enough insights for a lengthy debriefing.

15. ***Magic Tricks*** incorporate an online conjuring trick as a part of a training session. These tricks provide metaphors or analogies for important elements of the training content. They are also used as processes to be analyzed, reconstructed, learned, performed, or coached for training participants in appropriate procedures.

16. ***Matrix Games*** require participants to type the content in boxes of a grid displayed on the screen. The activity could be designed as a contest between individuals or teams to supply the most appropriate content for each box.

17. ***Openers*** are live online activities conducted near the beginning of a training session. They use interactive strategies to preview main points, orient participants, introduce participants to one another, form teams, establish ground rules, set goals, reduce initial anxieties, or stimulate self-disclosure.

18. ***Pair Work*** involves two people working on the same whiteboard to provide a joint response to a question. This strategy could be used at the beginning of an online session or at the end to provide a review.

19. ***Reflective Teamwork*** involves participants typing suggestions for a checklist on some aspect of online collaboration. Teams then evaluate their own performance by using the product they created.

20. ***Roleplays*** can be easily conducted in a live online session. The participants can be paired up to type-chat with each other or two volunteers can use their microphones to conduct an audio roleplay. Other participants may type their comments and coaching suggestions.

21. ***Sampling Activities*** present a collection of different examples (such as *email subject lines, conference session descriptions, lead paragraphs of articles, or names of popular products*). Through text-chat messages, participants analyze the samples, arrange them in different groups and sequences, identify key features, and list quality standards. Later, they apply their discoveries to create new products that meet their needs and conform to the standards.

22. ***Structured Sharing*** activities require and reward mutual learning and teaching among participants through text-chats. These activities create a context for a dialogue among participants based on their experiences, knowledge, and opinions.

23. ***Textra Activities*** combine the effective organization of well-written documents with the motivational impact of interactive strategies. Participants read short messages on the screen or longer documents that are downloaded. Later, they participate in an interactive exercise that uses peer pressure and peer support to encourage recall and transfer of what they read.

24. ***Troubleshooting Simulations*** can be used with technical topics and interpersonal concepts. They begin with a scenario presented by the online and facilitator supplemented by displays of instrument readouts. The participants suggest tests and the facilitator provides appropriate data. The process is repeated until the cause of the trouble is identified. The activity is followed by an online debriefing discussion.

25. ***Values Clarification*** uses forced choices, provocative issues, and confrontation of participants' inconsistencies. The strategy helps individual participants to decide among alternatives and determine what has personal meaning. The process does not force one set of right values but rather encourages discussion and exploration of alternatives before choosing a specific value.

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