Active Learners

Active learners best understand concepts by discussing, applying, or explaining the material; an active learner's phrase is "Let's try it out and see how it works" (Felder & Soloman, n.d., p. 1).

Find ways to discuss and problem-solve the material that you read and learn from lectures!

Study Habits Overview

1. **Actively experiment with concepts** – You will best process the course material if you can do something with the information, whether practicing the concept or explaining it (Felder & Silverman, 1988, p. 677).

2. **Active learners best study in groups** – If possible, study with others! Felder & Silverman (1988) explained that group work is an active learner's "most effective learning tool" (p. 680). Studying in groups allows you to hear others' explanations of a concept and to present your own views.

3. **Use effective study materials** – Sticky notes, flashcards, and different colored highlighters will help you actively recall information.

Brainstorming: Storyboarding

Storyboarding enables active learners to arrange and discuss different ideas, which allows them to problem-solve and discover solutions. For this exercise, use sticky notes or note cards to make rearranging ideas easier.

1. Identify the main topic and write this on a sticky note. Place the main idea at the top.
2. Then, begin writing down your ideas on additional sticky notes. You can write in phrases, whole sentences, or even draw pictures. Add these to the board in any order.
3. If you are working in a group, have everyone add their ideas to the board.
4. Then, begin analyzing your ideas or your group's ideas. Note or explain any connections that you see between the ideas.
5. Remove any extra ideas that do not help you complete your assignment or solve the problem.

Note-taking: Matrix

The Matrix note-taking method actively applies concepts you are reading or listening to by answering specific questions. If you are working by yourself, summarize the answers to these questions aloud afterward. If you are working in a group, discuss your varying answers. Oregon State University (2019) explained how to take these types of notes:

1. Your paper is divided into three primary sections: the main idea row, a question column, and a matrix. Access the Matrix note-taking template here.
2. Write the main ideas at the top with one idea over each column of the matrix.
3. List a key question you want to answer in the question column with one for each row.
4. As you go through the reading or lecture, record the answers in the grid! Then, summarize your answers aloud or discuss them with your group, as mentioned above.

Test-Taking: Feynman Technique

The Feynman technique benefits active learners because it allows them to explain complex concepts simply. The goal of this technique is to be able to communicate your course material as if you were explaining it to someone outside your field. The University of Colorado Boulder (2020) breaks down this technique:

1. Summarize what you already know about the course material from memory.
2. Then, rewrite these concepts in simple, direct language that anyone could understand.
3. Double-check your work. Note where you or your group misunderstood concepts or forgot key ideas.
4. Lastly, reorganize your notes based on your explanations, whether rearranging ideas, adding symbols, or color-coding.