Blended Unit Design: in-class activity examples

ACTIVITY	SUMMARY	USE	METHOD	NOTES / VARIATIONS
Think-pair-share (5 – 10 mins)	A useful strategy to encourage every member of the class, even shy students, to participate. It also fosters a community of learners and can help students get to know their peers.	Ask the group a question, pose a problem or get students to brainstorm.	Students work individually for a couple of minutes to work through the designated task. Under direction they then discuss the task with another student. Then call on the group to 'share' answers or ideas.	*Variation:* Extended think–pair–share. As before, students work individually and then in pairs, but for sharing they join in groups of four and then groups of eight. In smaller groups this can become a whole class debate.
Develop an effective argument (5 – 10 mins)	This activity gets students into the habit of supporting their arguments with academic evidence. Because students are assigned a role, they can be more critical about that stance.	Critical thinking, synthesising information and developing an academic argument.	A debatable statement or problem with two opposed solutions is posed to the group. Students work in pairs where one person has been assigned the affirmative and the other the negative side of the statement. Each person must develop a logical argument that follows a debating structure involving an assertion, rationale and supportive evidence.	This activity also works well in groups of four.

One-minute paper (1 – 5 mins)	A useful strategy for students to use to reflect on a lecture. It can also be used for peer support and guidance. Linking this activity to a discussion board means students can raise their questions in a peer-led discussion moderated by a lecturer.	At the end of a lecture or to check comprehension.	Ask students to note down for one minute what they understand the main point of the lecture to have been. They also write down areas of uncertainty. The students then discuss their notes with a person near them. Questions or areas of uncertainty can be posted on a discussion board.	*Variations:* **Main points:** Students try to list three to five main points raised in the lecture. They then compare their list with others, working in small groups of no more than five students. **Muddiest points:** Students write down the points that have confused them the most. **Collaborative review:** Students work together to summarise the lecture in three to five points.
Graphic organisers (15 mins)	Graphic organisers are a great way to simplify complex topics. Students can see categories and sub-categories, the flow of a process or the relationships between ideas. This can assist students to visually identify gaps in their understanding.	To allow students to reflect on what they have learnt and to clarify gaps in knowledge.	At the end of a lecture or a topic, provide students with a graphic organiser that has missing information. The graphic organiser can be a flow chart (processes), a branch diagram (hierarchies and categories), a mind map (ideas) or a table (relationships). Students are required to complete the graphic organisers. Working with the person next to them, they compare their organisers. Back in the large group, the lecturer can fill in the table with the students or show them the completed table.	

Multiple choice (5 – 10 mins)	Real time knowledge checks and voting systems can provide students with immediate feedback on learning.	To allow students to reflect on what they have learnt and to clarify gaps in knowledge.	At the start of the lecture, present students with several multiple-choice questions (no more than five) on the content you are going to cover, and have students discuss the answers. At the end of the lecture, post the same multiple-choice questions so that students can monitor their understanding. The use of electronic voting systems (EVS) works well here.	
Celebrity heads (10 – 15 mins)	This is an engaging activity that can be used to help students to clarify key ideas and concepts.	Revision of key term or concepts.	Write concepts, key words, people, and theories on cards. You will need multiple copies for each group. Divide students up into small groups of five to six. The students sit in a circle. Each person 'sticks' or holds their card so that they cannot see it, but the rest of their group can. One student asks 'yes' or 'no' questions to their group members and can keep asking questions until they get a 'no' answer. Then the person next to them has a turn at asking questions. The aim is to guess the term or concept on the card.	

Long-term learning groups (entire study period)	This system works well with postgraduates that are often used to working in teams and enjoy the contact with peers. There needs to be regular occasions (weekly is better) throughout the semester where students are required to work together in lectures to ensure that the bond between the students is maintained.	To build a community of learners.	Students are assigned to a small group of no more than four or five students at the start of the study period and are required to sit with that group and work through problems together (even to complete group assessments). Students can complete activities together and contact each other for help and guidance. The idea is that the students form a buddy group. The group members make sure everyone is completing work and provide a point of call for support and assistance.	
Problem-based learning (PBL) (Two sessions minimum)	Students are given a stimulus problem to solve in groups.	Students work in groups to engage with a problem that may last for several weeks.	Students working in small groups are assigned a problem. Typically, students analyse the problem and discuss their collective knowledge. Potential hypotheses or solutions are brainstormed. The group then identifies what additional information or resources are needed to test the hypothesis. The group develops a strategy or plan, and members are allocated roles. A period of independent research follows. The group reconvenes to share gathered information and to test the hypothesis in light of the new information. Students may then need to go through the cycle again if original hypotheses are not confirmed. This activity may lead into an assessment.	Students must be given time to develop their plan and to reconvene in class.

Jigsaw activities (30 – 50 mins)	This approach allows students to become relative 'experts' in a particular area, share this expertise with peers and build learning relationships. Just as in a jigsaw puzzle, each student has a piece of information that is essential for the completion and full understanding of the total picture (such as a patient profile, an individual education profile or an author's biography).	Builds student expertise in a particular area.	*Simple Jigsaw:* Students are divided into small groups of five to seven students. Each student is given a piece of information or a part to a problem, and a table to fill in. They become the expert in that area. They then have to talk to other members in the group. Each person has to share their information (expert role) while their team member listens and writes down the information (receiver). They swap roles and then check that they have recorded the information correctly. At the end of the activity each member of the group should have a completed table that records all the pieces of knowledge.	*Variation:* Expanded Jigsaw This is a bit more complicated but gets people moving. Students are assigned to a group – no more than five to six students. That group is given a piece of information or a problem that they need to work through and solve as a group (no more than five to six pieces of information). Hence, the entire group becomes experts in that area. The students then reform in new groups with people from different areas of expertise to share their information and to hear from others.
Digital story-telling (No more than 5 minutes in length but may take several hours to develop)	A digital story is a short movie that may combine photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and a narrative voice.	Digital stories are a great alternative to group presentations.	Students work in groups to create a digital story on a particular topic, as a scenario, a role play, or creative presentation. Students storyboard their movie, record movies and then edit the story. These can form part of the assessment.	Students can produce their own digital stories using flip videos, iPhones, iPads, or other mobile devices to record the story, and software such as iMovie or movie makers to edit the movie. The movies can then be uploaded to the Internet or uploaded to the LMS.

Electronic Voting Systems (EVS) (5 – 10 mins)	EVS can include the use of online response systems, such as Poll-Everywhere.	Students can either ask or respond to questions via an electronic voting system. EVS can be used for simple questions to check understanding or to give 'formative feedback' to both students and the lecturer.	Create your questions before the lesson. During the lesson ask students to access the link and respond to the questions using their mobile devices. The results are displayed instantly. This can be worked around pair work, problem solving and discussion.	These technologies are relatively easy to use. Students do not need to login so all they need is a device with Wi-Fi access.
Role-plays (10 – 15 mins)	Role plays can assist students to develop understanding and empathy. They also promote active learning by letting students use the space in the room to move around.	For engagement, to play the devil's advocate, kinaesthetic learning. Revision of ideas and concepts.	Students are broken up into small groups. Each group is given a scenario where group members are assigned parts to play.	Have a couple of different versions of the role play – that is, give different groups different scenarios and characters to play and then get them to swap cards after five minutes.

Six hats of critical thinking (10 – 15 mins)	This activity offers a chance to hear from different groups. It can also be used as the starting point for a group assessment.	To get students thinking critically about a problem or issue (collaborative learning)	A problem or issue is posed. Working in small groups of two to four, students think about a problem using Edward de Bono's Six Hats of critical thinking. Students spend several minutes discussing a problem. Wearing a particular hat, groups can then discuss their outcomes with other groups, or groups can be called on to present their ideas for a particular coloured hat. These are: **- The White Hat** calls for information known or needed; that is, what is known about the issue? **- The Red Hat** signifies feelings, hunches and intuition; that is, how students feel about the issue? **- The Black Hat** is judgement; that is, what is wrong or flawed or open to challenges? **- The Yellow Hat** symbolises brightness and optimism; that is, what are the benefits or what works? **- The Green Hat** focuses on creativity; that is, what new or innovative ideas can students see? **- The Blue Hat** is used to manage the thinking process. This is self-regulated learning. Students can also develop a written solution to the problem that can be collected and summarised.	*Variation:* Each person can take turn at wearing a hat or the whole group can progress together.