

Handouts on BB



# Activating students

Educational session

April 21, 2026



## Before we start

- No session on activating students without the necessary activation
- The more you are activated, the greater the learning effect.
- It's okay to make mistakes!

▪ Assignment



▪ Teaching methods



▪ Want to know more?





## Assignment 1 | Quick think



- **Instruction**
  - What does 'activating students' bring to mind?
  - 1 word
  - As many as you like
- **Procedure**
  - Individually (2')
  - min. 15 words as group



## Quick think



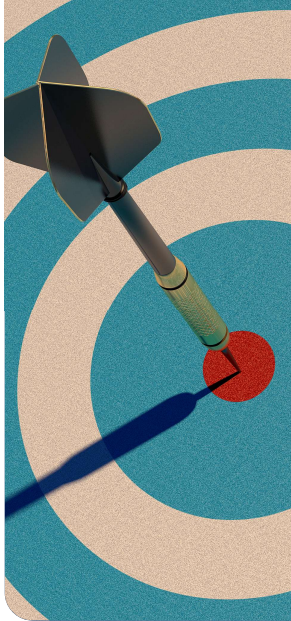
- Short assignment that requires some thought
- Time to think = difficulty of assignment
- Spontaneous or prepared

This method gives students a moment to think before they answer. The time you give shows how difficult the question is: a simple question needs only a few seconds; a more complex one needs more time.

You can use a Quick Think spontaneously or as a planned activity.

In this case, the goal was not to guide you to one specific answer. We mainly wanted to hear your ideas and opinions.

We also used Quick Think to check your prior knowledge. That helps me understand where you're starting from, so I can build on your input during the rest of our session.



## Learning objectives

After **completing the session**, you will be able to:

- explain the added value of activating students;
  - explain how you can activate students in a high-quality manner;
  - identify factors that can promote or hinder activating students.
- After **completing the (optional) application assignment**, you will be able to:
- apply an activating teaching method in your own teaching practice;
  - motivate your choices in this regard.

## On the menu today

What?

Why?

How?

Group exercise on activating teaching methods

Application assignment

## On the menu today

What?

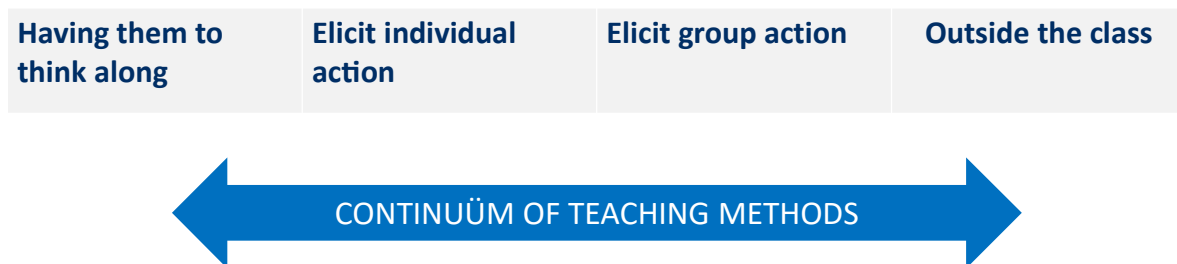
Why?

How?

Group exercise on activating teaching methods

Application assignment

## What do we mean by 'activating students'?



This figure shows a continuum of teaching methods — from very light forms of activation to more demanding ones.

On the left, we have **having students think along**. And this is important: activating students does not always mean interaction. Students can be active simply by thinking about a question, an example, or a short story — even if they don't answer out loud. A rhetorical question activates students because it makes them think. So silence does not mean they're not engaged. Right now, for example, I assume you're thinking along with me — and that means you are activated.

The next step is **eliciting individual action**: students actually do something on their own — a short task, a quick note, a small written answer.

Then we move to **eliciting group action**: teaching methods where students work together, such as a small group discussion or a shared task.

And in between, there are methods that **combine both individual and group work**. Think-pair-share is a good example: students first think individually, then discuss in pairs, and then sometimes share with the group. So it sits in the middle of the continuum.

Finally, on the right, we have **activation outside the class**. A lot of student activity happens before or after the contact moment: For example: reading a text, preparing for a flipped classroom, doing exercises, writing a short assignment... All of these are forms of activation too.

The key message here is that activating students can take many shapes. It's not only interaction, and it's not limited to what happens inside the classroom.



## Assignment 2 | Poll



- **Instruction**

“In today's higher education, there is **no** longer **any** place for traditional lectures with purely ex cathedra teaching.”

- Agree OR disagree
- Clarify your answer

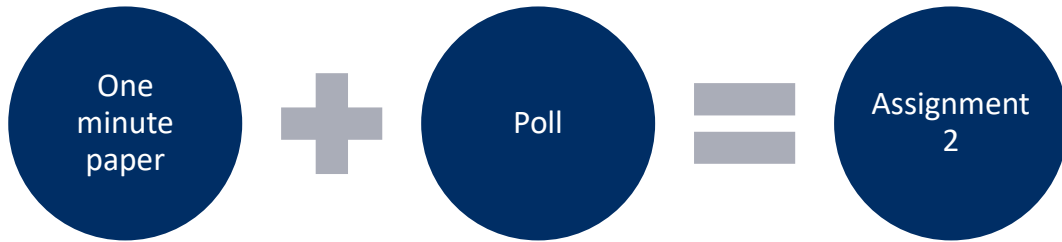
- **Procedure**

- Individually, take notes (1')
- Vote
- Plenary debriefing

Lecturing has advantages: it is efficient, it supports informing students, and it can be motivating when done well. For example, lecturing works very well when you need to introduce new terminology, give an overview of a theory, or explain a complex concept step by step. It is also useful when you want to quickly align everyone or provide a clear structure for new content.

So ex-cathedra teaching has its place — but it serves specific goals.

And this brings us to the bigger point: depending on your learning goals, you will choose different teaching methods.



## One minute paper



- **What?**
  - Short assignment, quick to complete
- **Tips & tricks**
  - Vary in timing
  - Vary in content
  - Vary in type of debriefing
  - Misleading term



A One Minute Paper is a *very short, focused task* that helps students stop for a moment and think. It also gives useful feedback for the lecturer. But the name is a bit misleading — it doesn't always take one minute. It depends on how you use it.

### 1. Variation in timing

You can use a One Minute Paper at different moments in your lesson:

- **At the start of class:** to activate prior knowledge and reconnect with the previous session.
- **During class:** as a short pause after an important part of the content.
- **At the end of class:** to check what students understood — helpful for them and for you.

### 2. Variation in content

The question you ask can focus on content, but it can also focus on students' learning process. For example:

- What questions do you still have?
- What did you find difficult?
- What helped you learn?

### 3. Variation in debriefing

There are many ways to follow up. You can:

- Discuss some answers briefly in class,
- Collect the papers and return to them next lesson,
- Ask students to post their answer online,
- Or keep it very short by giving **no direct feedback** — simply letting students reflect for themselves.

This last option takes almost no class time and is *always* possible.

#### **4. Misleading term**

It's called a "One Minute Paper," but the duration depends on your goal:

Without debriefing, it really can be one minute.

With discussion, it naturally takes longer.

## Poll



- **What?**
  - Question/opinion/statement + answer options
  - Vote
- **Tips & tricks**
  - On campus
  - Online
  - Debriefing!



### 1. Purpose of the task

In this example, we chose a very **extreme statement** on purpose. It creates energy and triggers reactions. It also opens the door to nuance: students can agree, disagree, or explain a more balanced view.

Sometimes you can also give **multiple possible solutions** instead of a single statement. If you do that, make sure that *all* options feel realistic. Students should be able to imagine why someone might choose each option.

### 2. Ways to vote

We used red and green cards for voting in this session. This works very well in a smaller group because you can immediately see the distribution of answers. Walking to a certain side of the room can give you an overview.

In larger groups, using colour cards remains very effective: Everyone must vote, which increases engagement. You can clearly see who doesn't vote. It avoids the issue of "I'll just wait and see what others do."

Hand-raising is possible, but it can create peer pressure and makes it easier for students to avoid voting.

### 3. Using digital tools (e.g., PollEverywhere)

Digital polling has its own advantages: **Anonymous participation**, which often leads to more honest responses. Very useful in **large groups**, as you get clear results immediately.

But there are also things to watch out for: In word clouds, students may give **inappropriate input**. Always use the **moderation function** so you can review answers before showing them.

#### **4. The importance of debriefing**

The poll itself is only the start — the **debriefing** is where learning happens.

With a statement that asks for an opinion, ask a few participants to explain their view.

Then add nuance or highlight differences.

With multiple-choice questions, the debriefing becomes feedback: *Why are some options incorrect? Why is one option the most effective?* This reflection helps students understand the reasoning behind their choice, not just the vote itself.

## On the menu today

What?

**Why?**

How?

Group exercise on activating teaching methods

Application assignment

## Why do I activate students?

eg. Assignment 2

- To achieve predetermined **learning objectives**
- To allow students to come to their **own insights**
- To stimulate **critical thinking**
- To activate **prior knowledge**
- To emphasize **key topics**
- To allow students to **process, deepen, or repeat** learning material
- To **motivate** students
- To **keep track** of student learning
- ...

First and foremost, we activate students in order to achieve learning objectives. The key idea is therefore to activate in a goal-oriented way, and not to activate for the sake of activating. So start from what you want to achieve with students: what they should know and be able to do at the end of the lesson or course unit. Then choose learning activities that are appropriate for that purpose.

- If students, for instance, need to be able to apply a certain theoretical framework, you can use a case study as a learning activity.
- If students need to be able to give a well-supported opinion on a certain topic, then a debate may be an appropriate activity.
- If students first need to possess a certain knowledge base, then a lecture, with the occasional quiz question, may be suitable.

This also relates to the idea of constructive alignment, an important didactic concept. It states that learning objectives, learning activities and learning resources, as well as assessment, must be aligned with one another. In other words, the learning activities and resources must be appropriate for achieving the learning objectives and for preparing students well for the assessment, and the assessment must be suitable for determining the extent to which the learning objectives have been achieved.

This naturally raises the question: “How do I know which learning activities are suitable for which learning objectives?” In many cases, the answer is self-evident when we think about it concretely for a moment. But gaining the necessary experience is sometimes also important in order to discover which learning activities work best for your students

to achieve certain objectives.

Be aware that you don't always have to reinvent the wheel — let yourself be inspired by colleagues or by your own teachers from the past.

Moving on to other reasons for activating students—namely, to help them arrive at their own insights or to stimulate critical thinking. That will not happen easily if they are merely passive recipients during the lesson.

Fourth, to activate prior knowledge. Prior knowledge is again an important didactic concept. We know that existing prior knowledge serves as a framework on which new knowledge can be built, making it easier to absorb that new information.

Next, try to build activation around key topics or main themes in the lesson. This way, you can help students focus their attention on these points, increasing the likelihood that this important information will stick.

Another reason, to allow students to process, deepen, or repeat learning material.

Finally, to motivate students and to keep track of their learning, Giving students the opportunity to work independently, alternating a theoretical explanation with questions via PollEverywhere, or letting students come up with their own concrete examples for an abstract framework can motivate them. Additionally, such exercises allow you to assess to what extent the student group has understood the lesson content and whether it is necessary to review certain points.

And of course, there will be many other reasons as well.

In many cases, there will be overlap between these different reasons in the implementation of an activating teaching method.

For example, through the assignment you just completed, we first allowed you to arrive at insights on your own, rather than us simply telling you that a traditional lecture can still be effective. Secondly, through the assignment with an 'extreme' statement, we highlighted an important topic, namely goal-oriented activation. And finally, we motivated you to actively think along and raise a card to participate.

## On the menu today

What?

Why?

**How?**

Group exercise on activating teaching methods

Application assignment

## How to get started?

### Choose activating teaching methods based on:

1. Predefined learning objectives
2. What you would like to achieve by activating your students
3. Taking into account the context
4. Taking into account the target group



How do you get started? How do you choose an appropriate way to activate students? First, look at your predefined learning objectives. Remember to always activate goal-oriented.

Then, ask yourself whether, besides the learning objectives, there are other things you want to achieve by activating your students. Think here of the various reasons for activating that we just went over.

Third, take into account the context in which you are teaching. And finally, also consider your target group, your students.



### 3. Taking into account the context

- Infrastructure

What we understand by 'context' covers a wide range of elements. We have selected four of them to discuss in more detail, but of course there may be many other factors that shape your context, and therefore your possibilities for activating students.

First, we would like to talk about the infrastructure of the classrooms. In a room with small flexible desks, there are more practical-organizational possibilities than, for example, in a traditional lecture hall.

If you are teaching in a traditional lecture hall, however, do not let that stop you from giving students small group tasks. A brief discussion with the person next to them, or with the two or three people seated nearby, can also work perfectly well in a lecture hall.



### 3. Taking into account the context

- Infrastructure
- Group size

 [Actively engaging large student groups \(2023\)](#)

The second contextual factor is the size of the student group. This will also influence how you can activate your students.



### 3. Taking into account the context

- Infrastructure
- Group size
- Security

Another aspect we need to take into account is safety. This includes physical safety, for example, in a lab mobile phones are often not allowed, which means that tools like PollEverywhere are not an option. It also includes emotional safety, for instance in classes where sensitive topics are discussed.



### 3. Taking into account the context

- Infrastructure
- Group size
- Security
- Time
- ...

Finally, there is the aspect of time. Time management is something many lecturers struggle with. And of course, no matter how you look at it, activating students takes time. It requires preparation time for you, to develop good tasks or questions and to provide clear instructions. But it will also take class time to actually carry out the activating teaching method. Still, it is important to make time for this in your lessons, since the learning impact can be significant. During this session, we have shown and will continue to show several examples of activating teaching methods that require little time, yet still add considerable value to students' learning process. As mentioned earlier, there may be other contextual factors at play, but I think we have covered the most common ones.

## 4. Taking into account target audience



**How can I activate all students?**



## Assignment 3 | Taking into account target audience

task

- **Instruction**
  - Answer the question: “How can I activate all students?”
- **Procedure**
  - Buzz session (10’)
  - In groups of 3 or 4, 1 spokesperson
  - Plenary debriefing: spokesperson gives best tip



**How can I activate all students?**

**IMPOSSIBLE**

In practice, activating every single student is almost impossible. However, there are various tips you can apply to activate as many students as possible. Also realize that students themselves play a role in this. If you, as a lecturer, give them multiple opportunities to actively work with the course material, it still up to the student to actually seize these opportunities.



Universiteit Amersfoort  
ODD | Opleidingsovergang  
Hogere Onderwijs

## Culture of activating

- Activate as soon as possible
- Start small, build up gradually
- Create a successful experience
- It's okay to make mistakes
- Work towards a positive classroom climate



[Culture of activation \(2018\)](#)  
[Positive classroom climate \(2020\)](#)

It's nearly impossible to activate *all* students at all times. So the question becomes: *How can we create conditions in which as many students as possible want to participate?*

That brings us to the idea of a **culture of activating**. A *culture of activating* means that activation is not an exception — it's the norm. Students become used to thinking for themselves, responding to questions, discussing with each other, and engaging with the content. It's a classroom climate where: students *expect* to participate, they feel safe to try, and they feel motivated to contribute.

In its core, it's about **motivation**: we motivate students *by creating a climate in which activation feels normal, meaningful, and safe*.

Now, knowing what a culture of activation looks like, let's move on to **some practical tips** you can use in your classroom.

**First, activate as soon as possible.** If you want students to get used to participating, start early. Even a small activity at the beginning of the course can set the tone for participation. For example, today we started with a quick think — nothing complicated, but it immediately signals: "Here, you will be invited to think and contribute."

**Next, start small and build gradually.** In the beginning, it's completely normal if only a few students participate. Start with simple, low-risk tasks: a short reflection, a quick poll,

or a question that almost every student can answer.

As the course continues and students gain confidence, you can gradually increase the difficulty or complexity of the tasks. For example, you might move from a simple individual question to a pair discussion, and later to a debate.

**Another key tip** is to **create successful experiences**. Students need early wins. Their first experiences with activation should be easy, doable, and short. You want them to feel: *“I can do this. I know something. My input matters.”*

This applies at the beginning of the course, but also at the beginning of each session. A small, successful experience at the start makes students more willing to participate later on. For example, asking students to list one thing they remember from last class or asking them an easy question is an easy way to boost confidence.

**Next**, it’s important to remember that **it’s okay to make mistakes**. Activation means taking small risks. Students know their answers may not always be correct. If they feel that a wrong answer will lead to embarrassment or judgement, they simply won’t participate. So we need to show that mistakes are normal. You can do this by: reassuring students, thanking them for trying, and responding in a constructive way. This kind of response teaches students that speaking up is safe, even when they’re unsure.

**Finally, work towards a positive classroom climate**. A good atmosphere is essential for participation. Students participate more when they feel comfortable with you and with each other. A positive climate means that: students feel their **ideas are heard**, they know **mistakes are okay**, they feel **comfortable working together**, and they can **get to know you and each other**. You can support this by showing genuine interest in their opinions, letting them have small choices in activities, being friendly and respectful, and using a bit of humor when appropriate. When the atmosphere is positive, students feel more confident. They ask questions, share ideas, and take more responsibility for their learning. A positive climate makes it much more likely that students **want to be activated**.

## Activate as many students as possible

### Obstacles

- Unprepared speaking
- Speaking in front of a group
- Not studied the learning materials
- Little/no experience with being activated

### Create opportunities

- Preparation time
- Solve in group
- Anonymize responses
- Come to class prepared
- Designate
- ...



[Activate as many students as possible \(2018\)](#)

[Come to class prepared \(2017\)](#)

25

Students can face several obstacles when being asked to participate:

**Students are unprepared to speak.** Some students haven't fully processed the content or thought about the question yet. A good strategy is to give them a few minutes to **write down possible answers**. This does two things: it helps them organize their ideas, and it makes sure **everyone thinks about the question**, not just the confident students.

**Students are nervous to speak in front of the group.** Many students are nervous to speak, or they fear giving a 'wrong' answer. You can reduce this pressure by letting them start in pairs or small groups. After a short discussion, they can share a group answer instead of an individual answer. This feels much safer and still keeps everyone active.

**Students have little or no experience with being activated.** Some students are not used to being asked to participate. Start with **low-risk, simple tasks**, and build slowly. Each positive experience increases their willingness to participate next time.

In some groups, there may be a student who is very confident or dominant. This student can sometimes **take over the discussion**, which can make it harder for others to participate. You can turn this into a positive learning opportunity:

- **Give the dominant student a clear role.** For example, ask them to **argue for or against a point** or let the student summarize the group's ideas.

- **Make their contribution useful for the whole group.** Other students can **respond, add ideas, or give a different perspective.**

This way, the dominant student is **helping the group think**, instead of blocking others.

The key idea is: don't try to stop the dominant student completely, but **guide their energy so it supports everyone's learning.**

Other practical tips:

- Encourage students to **come prepared.** You can explain why preparation matters, or use subtle peer pressure, like telling them they will share their findings with the group.
- Give **clear instructions** and make the **purpose of the activity clear** so students know what is expected.
- Always **follow up on the answers.** Show that everyone has a chance to contribute and that contributions are valued.
- If you designate students to answer, provide **support and hints** if needed. This shows that making mistakes is okay and reduces fear over time. It is important to remember: the way you designate students can affect participation. You don't have to call on every student, but if you **randomly select some students**, more people will think about the question. If you do it in a **playful or low-stress way**, you can avoid creating anxiety.

The main goal is to **lower the barriers** for participation. By giving preparation time, using small groups, supporting students when they speak, and carefully designating speakers, **more students will participate, think actively, and share ideas.**

All of this supports what we discussed earlier: it is part of creating a **culture of activating**, where students feel safe, motivated, and used to participating. And remember to always explain **why you activate students**: active participation improves learning because students are **thinking, applying, and connecting ideas themselves, not just listening.** It leads to deeper learning.



## Buzz session



- Short group assignment
- Small groups
- First discussion in small groups, then for the whole class

One of the ways to **overcome some of these obstacles** is a **buzz session**.

A buzz session is a **short group assignment** done in **small groups**. Students first **discuss the question or problem in their small group**, and then the **group shares their ideas with the whole class**.

This has several benefits:

- Students who are nervous to speak in front of the whole class can **start in a smaller, safer setting**.
- Everyone has a chance to **think and contribute**, not just the confident few.
- It encourages **peer learning**, because students explain their ideas to each other before sharing with the full class.

So, the buzz session is a practical way to **lower the barriers to participation**, help students get comfortable speaking, and make sure more students are actively engaged.



## Assignment 4 | Exit ticket (part 1)



- **Instruction**
  - Wat are the most important ideas that you will incorporate into your own teaching practice?
  - What things would you like to try out?
- **Procedure**
  - Individually (2')

## On the menu today

What?

Why?

How?

**Group exercise on activating teaching methods**

Application assignment



## Group exercise | Activating teaching methods: part 1

- **Instruction**

- Study given teaching method
- Answer the questions in group
- Take notes in Padlet

- **Procedure**

- Expert group
- 20'
- Part 2: exchange ideas in mixed groups

**Group blue:**

1. Joep
2. Ruben
3. Anastasia
4. Frederik
5. Camille

→ World café

**Group red:**

1. Jonas
2. Rreze
3. Annemie
4. Andrea
5. Paul
6. Daniel

→ Flipped classroom

**Group green:**

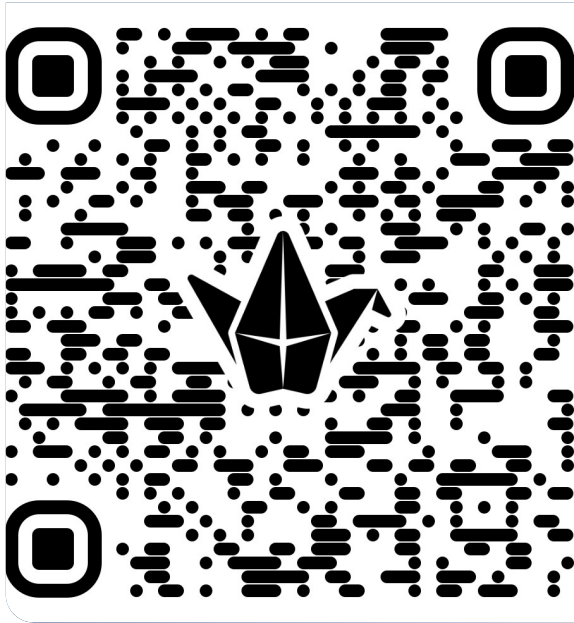
1. Alexander
2. Samar
3. Kristin
4. Alessia
5. Emmy

→ Muddiest point

**Group purple:**

1. Tim
2. Kirsten
3. Alben
4. Anton
5. Kris
6. Filip

→ Think – pair – share



## Padlet

- Go to the [Padlet](#) via the **QR code** or the **link on BB**
- Go to the **column** for your group
- Click on **'+'** at the top of your column
- Click on **Publish**



## Group exercise | Activating teaching methods: part 2

### ▪ Instruction

- Expert: introduce your teaching method
- Others
  - Other advantages/pitfalls?
  - Would you use this teaching method yourself? Why/why not?

### ▪ Procedure

- Mixed groups
- Presentation by expert + group discussion
- 40'

### Group 1

1. Joep
2. Camille
3. Alexander
4. Rreze
5. Paul
6. Kirsten

### Group 2

1. Ruben
2. Samar
3. Andrea
4. Daniel
5. Anton
6. Filip

### Group 3

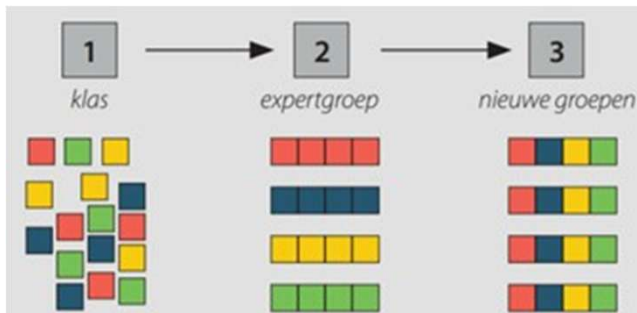
1. Anastasia
2. Kristin
3. Emmy
4. Annemie
5. Alben

### Group 4

1. Frederik
2. Alessia
3. Jonas
4. Tim
5. Kris



## Jigsaw



- **Why this teaching method?**
  - Everyone activated
  - Small groups lower the threshold
  - Learn from each other
  - Skill is more important than knowledge
- **Group division**
  - Expert groups
  - Mixed groups

This teaching method is called the jigsaw.

Why did we choose the jigsaw? First, it is a very activating teaching method because everyone is activated. Everyone gets a chance to speak and has to present the topic in which they became an expert. This can be challenging for some students, but working in small groups lowers the threshold for speaking. Additionally, learning from each other is extremely valuable. Explaining something to someone else is a very effective way to learn.

This teaching method is best used only when students need to complete a group assignment where the acquired knowledge is secondary to the skill that students are learning during the task. In this case, for example, it was more important for us that you learn to think about activating teaching methods than that you know exactly what each method entails.



## Buzz session

During a buzz session (also called 'buzz group' or 'zoom group'), students carry out a short group assignment in small groups. When the 'humming' of the student groups gradually decreases, this is an indication that most students have completed the assignment and the debriefing can start. During this debriefing, some students can explain their solution to the assignment. At the end of this debriefing, summarise the answers, complete the answers if necessary and correct any wrong answers.

## BUZZ SESSION

ACTIVATING  
TEACHING AND  
LEARNING METHOD

1

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

remembering	analysing
understanding	synthesising
applying	evaluating

### PHASE

Introduction	Processing
Repetition	Evaluation
Acquisition	

### CONTEXT

individual	online	synchronous	large groups
with others	on campus	asynchronous	small groups

### TIPS

- Don't make the buzz groups too large (ideally 2 - 4 students per group).
- When the students are working in buzz groups, you can visit some (or all) of the groups and listen or even join the discussion.
- To stimulate active learning and participation, you can ask your students to come up with three key words with regard to the learning content covered in the lecture.

We would like to refer you to our online Booklet. It contains the activating teaching methods we used and discussed today, as well as many others, explained in detail. You may find additional inspiration there for your own teaching.

## Take home message

1

Don't activate just to activate, but be goal-oriented.

2

Always take context and student characteristics into account.

3

Focus on a culture of activation and on activating as many students as possible.

## On the menu today

What?

Why?

How?

Group exercise on activating teaching methods

**Application assignment**

## Optional application assignment

- Design a future contact moment that activates students.
- Min. 50'
- Detailed lesson plan
- Justify your choice of activating teaching method(s) (using the guiding questions)
  
- Study guide and template on BB
- **Deadline May 12, 2026**

## Feedback form 'Activating students'

