American Association of Critical-Care Nurses
Active Learning Strategies

Active learning is an instructional approach that engages nurses in the learning process, moving beyond passive listening. This document outlines various active learning strategies that can be implemented across different educational settings to enhance understanding, retention, and critical thinking skills.

Active learning is shown to improve educational outcomes by:

➢ Increasing nurse engagement and motivation.
➢ Fostering deeper understanding and retention of material.
➢ Developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

➢ Promoting collaboration and communication among nurses.
➢ Providing immediate feedback on the nurse(s) understanding.
➢ Minimizing multitasking or distractions during learning.

Active Learning Strategies:

Strategy	Description	Presentation Format	Suggested Length	Intended Impact
Interactive Polling Questions	Multiple-choice or open-ended questions are posed, and immediate feedback/discussion follows. Formats may include electronic or manual hand-raised audience polling.	**Live**: In-person or online **Enduring**: Presenter prompts to pause and select an answer during self-paced learning.	10-20 minutes	Knowledge recall, immediate feedback
Reflective Q & A	Structured questions that prompt nurses to consider their experiences, feelings, and actions related to a topic to gain insight.	**Live**: In-person or online. **Enduring**: Nurses are prompted to pause and reflect during self-paced learning.	10-20 minutes	Self-assessment, professional development
Case Studies	Nurses analyze real-world scenarios or problems, applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations.	**Live**: In-person or online. **Enduring**: Nurses are prompted to pause and analyze during self-paced learning.	20-45 minutes	Problem-solving, application, analysis
Think-Pair-Share	Nurses first think individually about a question, then discuss with a partner, and finally share their thoughts with the larger group.	**Live**: In-person or online.	5-15 minutes	Critical thinking, communication
Simulation Exercises	High-fidelity or low-fidelity scenarios where nurses practice clinical skills, teamwork, and decision-making in a safe, controlled environment.	**Live**: In-person	30-90 minutes	Clinical skills, teamwork, and decision-making
Return Demonstration	Nurses perform a specific skill or procedure while the instructor observes and provides feedback.	**Live**: In-person	5-15 minutes per nurse	Psychomotor skills, competency validation
One-Minute Paper	Nurses write a brief response to a specific question (e.g., "What was the most confusing point today?").	**Live**: In-person or online. **Enduring**: Nurses are prompted to write during self-paced learning.	2-5 minutes	Reflection, identifying gaps in understanding

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Teach-back	Exercises where nurses explain concepts or instructions back to the educator in their own words to confirm understanding.	**Live**: In-person or online.	5-10 minutes	Comprehension, patient education, clarity
Collaborative Annotation	Nurses work together to highlight, comment on, and question a shared text or document.	**Live**: In-person or online.	15-30 minutes	Reading comprehension, deep engagement
Online Bulletin Board (e.g. Padlet, Jamboard, Miro)	A digital platform where nurses can post notes, links, images, and questions collaboratively for brainstorming and resource sharing.	**Live**: In-person or online.	Ongoing (may remain active after learning activity)	Resource sharing, collaboration, and brainstorming
Sticky Note Exercise	In-person learners place physical sticky notes in the educational space to post questions, prompts, notes, or ideas for sharing. It can also be used to capture future actions or follow-up ideas.	**Live**: In-person	15-30 minutes	Resource sharing, collaboration, and brainstorming.
Drag and drop	An interactive activity in which nurses physically or digitally match items, sequence steps, or categorize concepts.	**Live**: In-person or online **Enduring**: Requires interactive technology	5-10 minutes	Application, sequencing, categorization
Knowledge Check-In	Multiple-choice or true/false questions are placed throughout or at the end of an activity module.	**Enduring**: Requires interactive technology	10-20 minutes	Cognitive understanding, content mastery, decision-making
Jigsaw Method	Nurses are assigned to "expert groups" to learn a specific part of a topic, then return to "home groups" to teach their part to others.	**Live**: In-person or online (break-out rooms)	30-60 minutes	Content mastery, teaching, synthesis
Debates	Nurses take and defend opposing viewpoints on a topic, requiring them to research and articulate their position.	**Live**: In-person or online	30-60 minutes	Argumentation, critical evaluation

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