Learning Activities: Making Learning Interactive

Faculty

Mr. William Brunson, Esq.

Description

Why do presenters rely on lectures to the exclusion of other learning activities such as small groups, case studies, debates, learning games, etc. Presenters should design effective learning activities that help the students achieve the learning objectives. Learning objectives define _what_ the students will learn. The learning activities define _how_ the students will achieve those learning objectives.

Learning Objectives

As a result of this course, participants will be able to:

- Describe why the lecture method is used to exclusion of other methods; and
- Design learning activities that assist their learners in accomplishing the learning objectives.

Materials

Printed

- Designing Effective Learning Activities
- Best Practices for Using Learning Activities

Designing Effective Learning Activities
William Brunson, Esq.

Visualize your favorite instructor. What qualities did he or she possess?

Choosing the learning activities: To choose appropriate learning activities, you should consider the participants' backgrounds, the desired learning objectives, the learning environment, and the amount of time you have available for meeting the objectives. This outline will consider the following types of activities:

Lecture	**Role playing**
Tests and quizzes	**Learning games**
Debate	**Brainstorming**
Socratic method and questioning	**Case study**
Small discussion groups or "buzz groups"	**Video**
Object-Based Learning or Inquiry	**Simulations**

> **Lecture:** A *discourse* given before an audience upon a given subject, usually for the purpose of instruction. VI OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 169 (4th ed. 1978).
>
> *Discourse:* To hold discourse, to speak with another or others, talk, converse; to discuss a matter, confer; . . . to speak or write at length on a subject. III OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 430 (4th ed. 1978).

Why is the lecture the most commonly used learning activity in the world?

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What makes an effective lecturer?

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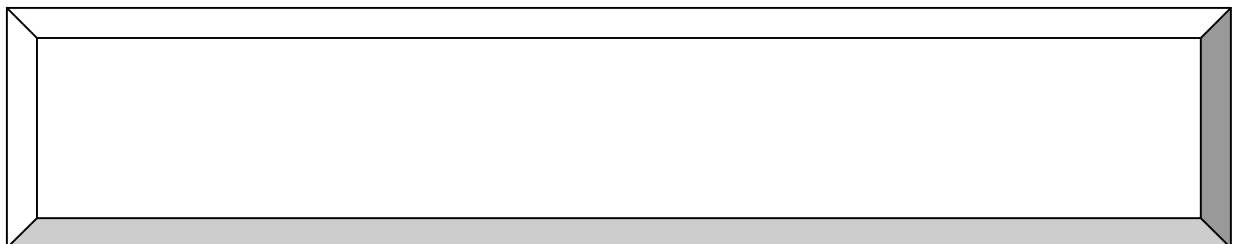
> **Test:** An examination to determine factual knowledge or mental proficiency especially given to students during the course of a school term and covering a limited part of the year's work. WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY 2362 (15th ed. 1966).
>
> **Quiz:** The act or action of quizzing; specifically, a short oral or written test often taken without special preparation. *Id.* at 1868.

Why is there resistance to tests and quizzes? How do you explain the popularity of quiz shows like *Jeopardy* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*?

Classroom uses for tests and quizzes

- **Pre-test:** Use of a pre-test before a course can provide the instructor with a clear indication of how much the participants know at the outset of the presentation.

- **Quizzes:** Providing short quizzes during the presentation will aid in retention rates.

- **Post-test:** Use of a post-test at the end of a presentation provides a summary of how well the participants retained the information. *Suggestion:* Allow sufficient time for feedback because the test will not be effective if the students do not learn what they have misapprehended.

> **Debate:** Contention in argument; dispute, controversy; discussion; . . . to dispute about, argue, discuss. III OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY 76 (4th ed. 1978).

Two primary classroom uses for debates:

1. **Formal:** Ask the participants to split into two groups selecting opposing sides of an issue. Each group should select a recorder, a gatekeeper and presenter(s).

   - **Recorder:** The recorder writes down all the arguments that support their position.

   - **Gatekeeper:** The gatekeeper keeps track of the time and ensures that everyone gets a chance to provide information. Also, this person clarifies points as the recorder writes.

   - **Presenter:** The presenter(s) will present the arguments of the group once the entire group is reconstituted.

   Each side then presents its arguments. The instructor questions the presenter(s) to ensure that all salient arguments are exposed. The presenters could be seated as a panel at the front of the room.

2. **Informal (and easier):** The instructor identifies the two sides of an argument and splits the class into two groups. Team A will support the argument and Team B will support the opposing view. Asking for volunteers, the instructor asks Team A to give an-argument. Then, the instructor asks for the contrary view from Team B.

   - What do you do if there are no volunteers?

   - What if the debate becomes lopsided?

   - What subject matters may be suitable for this type of activity?

Socratic Method / Large Group Discussion

> **Socratic Method:** Socrates' "philosophical method of systematic doubt and questioning of another to reveal his hidden ignorance or to elicit a clear expression of a truth supposed to be implicitly known by all rational beings." WEBSTER'S NINTH NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY 1119 (1986). In the law school context, the Socratic method has been defined as "involv[ing] a teacher asking a series of questions, ideally to a single student, in an attempt to lead the student down a chain of reasoning either forward, to its conclusions, or backward, to its assumptions." Susan H. Williams, *Legal Education, Feminist Epistemology, and the Socratic Method*, 45 STAN. L. REV. 1571, 1573 (1993).

How do people feel about the Socratic method?

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Suggestions for Large Group Discussions

- Plan key questions
- Questions should proceed from lower to higher level thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy:
  - ❒ Knowledge: The student can identify and recall information: who, what, when, where, how. Example: What is the hearsay rule?
  - ❒ Comprehension: The student can present information in his or her own words.
  - ❒ Application: The student can apply theory to specific facts. Example: How does the hearsay rule apply to these facts?
  - ❒ Analysis: The student can separate the whole into component parts. Example: If FRE 804 did not require the declarant to be unavailable, what would be the consequence?
  - ❒ Synthesis: The student can construct ideas and concepts from multiple sources to form new, integrated information. Example: Under FRE 403, is it a good practice to limit otherwise admissible hearsay evidence?
  - ❒ Evaluation: The student can judge or assess ideas on the basis of specific standards and criteria. Example: How would you assess the effectiveness of the hearsay rule in determining reliable evidence?

Bloom's Taxonomy

Evaluation
Synthesis
Analysis
Application
Comprehension
Knowledge
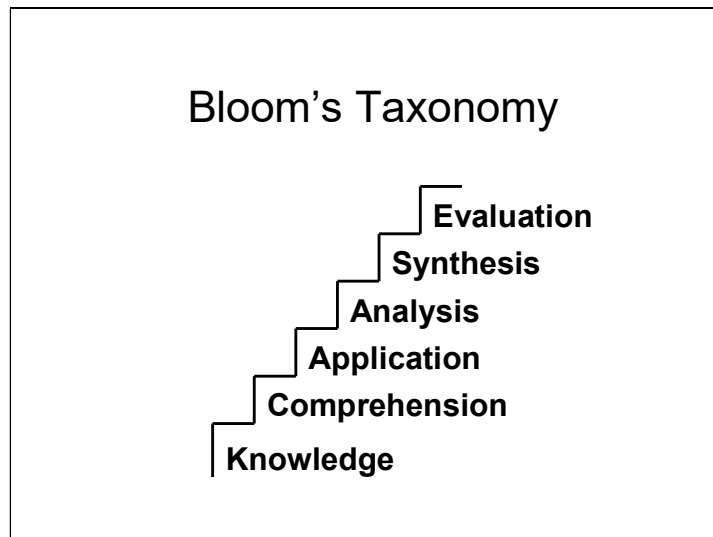
Why do many instructors fail when they try to use questions?

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Small discussion groups or "buzz groups"

Buzz Groups: Buzz groups are named after the noise and chatter created by small groups of students engaged in discussions during a presentation.

Method: The instructor asks the class participants to split into small groups, discuss a topic, and report back.

Suggestions for Use of "Buzz Groups"

❐ Develop explicit instructions concerning what you want them to do.

❐ Give all instructions before splitting them into groups.

❐ Provide a handout with written as well as oral instructions for the activity.

❐ Ask each group to select a reporter (if necessary -- for reporting back to the larger class) and a recorder (if necessary -- for producing a written product to be reported back to the larger class)

❐ Set a time limit. You can be flexible but give them some idea of how long you anticipate the activity to take.

❐ Before ending the group work, give the students a one-minute time warning telling them to wrap things up.

❐ If there is a report back, be clear in your instructions about what you expect the reporters to report.

✸**Quiz:** How many learning activities have we used in this presentation (circle below)?

1. Lecture	6. Role Playing
2. Test or quiz	7. Learning Game
3. Debate	8. Brainstorming
4. Socratic method / Large group discussion	9. Case study
5. Small discussion group or "buzz group"	10. Video

Role Plays

Role-playing: The instructor presents a realistic or hypothetical situation and provides a cast of characters. "The students then improvise dialogue and actions to fit their views of the situation and the character they are playing." Barbara Gross Davis, TOOLS FOR TEACHING 159 (1993). In a mediation course, for example, the instructor would provide a fact scenario and ask the students to play the following roles: (1) mediator; (2) attorney for client A; (3) attorney for client B; (4) client A; (5) client B.

Brainstorming

> **Brainstorm:** A sudden inspiration or bright idea; a harebrained idea: a wild or impractical flash of inspiration; to practice a conference technique by which a group attempts to find a solution for a specific problem by amassing all the ideas spontaneously contributed by its members. WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY 266 (15th ed. 1966)

Brainstorming Method: Ask the participants to provide as many ideas as possible and write them on a flipchart. In doing so, do not critique them because you want to encourage as many responses as possible. Also, write down each response. For repetitive responses, ask the provider if one of the other responses is sufficient. *Suggestion:* Ensure that your reasons for brainstorming are clear, and there is some closure to the process.

Case Studies

> **Case Study:** A good case poses a challenging problem. They can be quite detailed (e.g., 10 to 20 pages) or quite simple (e.g., half to one page). Case studies can be used to provide the facts to test a legal theory.

Potential sources of information for case studies? Case law, newspaper and other media reports, your experiences, others' experiences

Learning Games

- ❖ Increase motivation
- ❖ Attract involvement
- ❖ Assist students in applying information

See next page for Object Based Learning **….**

Object Based Learning or Object Based Inquiry

> **Object-Based Learning (OBL):** "A form of active learning that uses artworks, artifacts, archival materials, or digital representations of unique objects to inspire close observation and deep critical thinking . . . . It is a powerful idea for students to realize that as they examine the object, they are standing in the same proximity as the person who created it. This connection can inspire curiosity among learners, which influences how they use discovery as a learning tool. … Object-based learning holds the object at the center of the learning experience. Objects are sometimes also referred to as primary sources, cultural resources, or material culture. Overall, this type of engagement involves experiential learning and multi-sensory interaction. Learners may focus on learning about those who created the object, the materials used to make the object, its socio-cultural significance, its various interpretations, the context in which it was produced, its current context within a collection, how it is a catalyst for discussion, or how it inspires contemporary creativity. The most common venues for OBL are galleries, libraries, archives, and museums, but OBL can take place in the classroom as well." University of Miami: https://tinyurl.com/Object-Based-Learning.

Best Practices for Using Learning Activities

William Brunson, Esq.[*]

Guidelines for Lectures

❑ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the lecture helps the participants to achieve a learning objective.

❑ *Lecture for relatively short periods*. While controversial, adult education research has shown that lectures should generally last no longer than 10 to 15 minutes before you use another type of learning activity.

❑ *Establish what's in it for the participant*. The learning objectives don't have to be the first thing you discuss. Indeed, in many cases, you may want to begin with an opening that captures the participants' attention, establishes credibility, and/or sets the stage for the remainder of the session. Nevertheless, identifying what the participant will gain from the presentation is quite important for focusing the participants' attention, and the learning objectives provide a roadmap.

❑ *Be concise*. Reduce the major points in the lecture to key words that act as verbal subheadings or memory aids. In PowerPoint, the NJC recommends utilizing the 7x7 rule: Use no more than seven phrases on each slide and seven words in each phrase, relying on key words and phrases instead of complete sentences. Maximum is 9x9 phrases and words.

❑ *Don't read from the slides*. The 7x7 rule and words and phrases help eliminate this possibility.

❑ *Offer examples*. When possible, provide real-life illustrations (concrete examples) of the lecture's main ideas, especially when the lecture is theoretical in nature.

❑ *Use analogies*. If possible, make a comparison between the content of the lecture and knowledge the participants already possess.

❑ *Use audio-visual aids*. Use a variety of media to enable participants to see and hear what you are saying.

❑ *Use vivid language and graphics*. In creating new slides, use vivid language and graphics. You may wish to use mnemonic devices and other aids to memory. Also, storytelling can be quite effective for improving retention.

Guidelines for Tests and Quizzes

❑ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the test or quiz will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❑ *Use pre-tests to assess participants' needs*. Use of a pre-test before a course can provide you with a clear indication of how much the participants know at the outset of the presentation.

❑ *Use short quizzes*. Providing short quizzes during the presentation will aid in retention rates.

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[*]I acknowledge the assistance of Joseph Sawyer in creating the best practices.

Guidelines for Tests and Quizzes (Cont.)

❐ *Consider using a post-test*. Use of a post-test at the end of a presentation provides a summary of how well the participants retained the information. However, be sure to allow sufficient time for feedback because the test will not be effective if the participants do not learn what they have misapprehended.

❐ *Provide 3 to 5 choices for multiple choice questions*. Adding implausible, incorrect choices doesn't add value to the question.

❐ *Use incorrect choices that are possibly correct*. In multiple choice questions, the purpose of an incorrect answer is to reduce the chances that the participant can guess the correct answer.

❐ *Avoid using negatives.* Generally, a question that begins with "which of the following is not ..." is more difficulty for participants to discern and may mislead them. However, if you are assessing the participant's verbal reasoning ability, negatives are appropriate.

❐ *Write multiple choice responses so they are relatively equal in length*. You don't want to make it easy for the participant to guess the answer based upon the correct choice standing out due to its length.

❐ *Use same grammatical structure.* Use the same grammatical structure for each choice. See the rationale above.

❐ *Don't trick the learner.* Avoid using language that tricks or confuses the participant. Test questions should measure what the participant knows about the subject matter.

❐ *Avoid "All of the above."* It's usually the correct answer and offers a good guess to a test-taker who doesn't know the subject matter.

Guidelines for Large Group Discussions

❐ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the large group discussion will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❐ *Call on the participants who are paying attention*. Your purpose is to keep the discussion active and engaging. You are not trying to embarrass those who are not paying attention.

❐ *Wait for responses*. Many instructors will answer their own questions because they fear having silence in the classroom as they wait for answers. You certainly may rephrase the question and tell the participants that you will wait them out or call on someone.

❐ *Plan key questions in advance*. Most presenters don't plan the questions they are going to ask. Accordingly, they ask questions such as, "Any questions?," which may be asked in such way that they don't really want questions. Instead, plan the questions so they help the learners reach the learning objectives. Questions should be leading.

❐ *Questions should proceed from lower to higher level thinking*. The NJC derived this principle from Bloom's Taxonomy. Below are some examples:

❏ Knowledge: The participant can identify and recall information: who, what, when, where, how. Example: What is the hearsay rule?

❏ Comprehension: The participant can present information in his or her own words. Example: In your own words, can you tell me what the hearsay rule is?

Guidelines for Large Group Discussions (Cont.)

❒ Application: The participant can apply theory to specific facts. Example: How does the hearsay rule apply to these facts?

❒ Analysis: The participant can separate the whole into component parts. Example: If FRE 804 did not require the declarant to be unavailable, what would be the consequence?

❒ Synthesis: The participant can construct ideas and concepts from multiple sources to form new, integrated information. Example: Under FRE 403, is it a good practice to limit otherwise admissible hearsay evidence?

❒ Evaluation: The participant can judge or assess ideas on the basis of specific standards and criteria. Example: How would you assess the effectiveness of the hearsay rule in determining reliable evidence? At this stage, the participant would be able to rewrite the rule.

Guidelines for Small Group Discussions (a.k.a., Buzz Groups)

❒ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the small group discussions will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❒ *Give all instructions before splitting participants into groups*. Otherwise, the participants will begin forming relationships with their group members and miss the instructions.

❒ *Develop explicit instructions*. They should clearly state what you want the participants to do. You may want to test the instructions with a few colleagues to ascertain if they understand the exercise. Show the instructions on a PowerPoint slide as the groups are meeting.

❒ *Provide written instructions*. Provide a handout with written and oral instructions for the activity. Written instructions can assist the groups while they are working in their groups. This is especially important for large groups.

❒ *Select a reporter*. Ask each group to select a reporter (if necessary – for reporting back to the larger class) and a recorder (if necessary – for producing a written product to be reported back to the larger class). This should be an explicit instruction. Otherwise, the group members will look at one another when you ask for the report back, thereby delaying and likely resulting in less effective report backs.

❒ *Check-in*. During the group discussions, check in with the groups. Do this by simply walking by and listening as they talk. You don't need to interrupt their work. You are simply listening to ensure they are on task. If they need help, provide it.

❒ *Set a time limit*. You can be flexible but give the participants some idea of how long the activity is anticipated to take.

❒ *Time warning*. Before ending the group work, give the participants a one-minute time warning telling them to wrap things up. This will assist the reporters in knowing they have just a minute to collect their thoughts.

❒ *Provide clear instructions for report back*. If there is a report back, be clear in the instructions about what the reporters are to communicate. Obviously, you don't want to embarrass the reporters as they report, so make the instructions as clear as possible.

Guidelines for Case Studies

❒ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the case study will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❒ *Pose a challenging problem*. Case studies can be quite detailed (e.g., 10 to 20 pages) or quite simple (e.g., one paragraph to one page). You can use case studies to provide the facts to test a legal theory. The appropriate length of a case study is relative to the amount of time that you have available for its use and debrief. The feedback is the most important part of a case study, so don't shorten that aspect of the process.

❒ *Tell a "real" story*. Participants prefer to work on problems that they're likely to confront in their work, so the more realistic, the better.

❒ *Raise a thought-provoking issue*. The case study hopefully will raise issues that the participants may not have considered before.

❒ *Have elements of conflict*. The case study should explore areas of conflict where learners' ideas are likely going to differ about the best resolution.

❒ *Promote empathy with the central characters*. Case studies shouldn't present persons as entirely evil or entirely good. Creating nuanced characters will generally add to the complexity of the issue.

❒ *Write the case study so that it contains the following elements*. It should . . .

    ❒ lack an obvious or clear-cut right answer.
    ❒ encourage participants to think and take a position.
    ❒ demand a decision.

❒ *Write clearly and concisely*. Clear writing always assists the learner in understanding the issues. *See* Barbara Gross Davis, TOOLS FOR TEACHING 159, 162 (1993).

Guidelines for Role Plays

❒ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the role play will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❒ *Provide a cast of role players*. The best role plays have characters for whom the learners will have empathy. See case studies above.

❒ Provide a script or have students improvise dialogue (the latter is usually preferred).

❒ Ensure that the role play is relatively brief (5 to 10 minutes at most for most uses).

❒ *Create or find realistic fact scenarios*. Base the role play on a factual scenario that is realistic. See suggestions above for case studies.

❒ *Provide different information to role players*. Consider providing differing information to the various role players. Because this would be true in a true-to-life situation, the role players' different knowledge more realistically represents the fact that different persons would have access to different information.

Guidelines for Role Plays (Cont.)

❑ *Debrief the role play*. Provide sufficient time to adequately debrief the role play. You are engaging the participants in a role play, so they can assess how each of the roles responded. Plan questions for the debrief that will elicit useful information for assessing the role players' behaviors. The debrief is the most important aspect of most role-playing situations.

Guidelines for Brainstorming

❑ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the brainstorming exercise will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❑ *Draft a clear purpose statement*. Provide a clear statement about what you want the participants to brainstorm. Example: What are the qualities of an effective judicial leader?

❑ *Use a title*: If using an easel pad, use a title prepared with a summary of the statement (e.g., Leadership Qualities). NOTE: Easel pads are not useful with large audiences. Use PowerPoint with a macro enabled.

❑ *Write responses*. Write each response as it's provided. As the learner provide their responses, seek clarification on each provided point or ask the participant, "May the reporter write x" to simplify the entry or otherwise frame it so it fits the objective. Another suggestion is to ask the participants to condense their responses to a set number of words (or less). The benefit is doing so will help the learners to clarify their own points.

❑ *Prepare a PowerPoint slide with brainstorming subject/question*. The slide should contain either the question or a title that reflects the subject matter of the brainstorming. Below the title or question, create blank space for capturing the thoughts of the participants. Example: Leader Qualities.

❑ *Don't critique and don't let others critique.* Critiquing or allowing others to critique will likely result in learners who are unwilling to provide suggestions. If you want to prioritize the responses, it's best to solicit *all* of the responses first and then ask the participants for their favorites. This way, you are concentrating on the positive, not the negative.

❑ *Provide closure*. The purpose of the brainstorming exercise is to solicit lots of good ideas quickly. State why you solicited the ideas and how they fit into the larger educational session.

Guidelines for Using Video

❑ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the video will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❑ *Use video to provide concrete experience*. Video helps learners understand concepts and retain information, especially if they have no previous experience with the topic. Videos also can increase the participants' enthusiasm and increase motivation to learn, especially if the video is particularly effective

❑ *Use the proper length of video*. Depending upon your learning objective(s), choose a video that helps you accomplish your goal in the least amount of time.

Guidelines for Using Video (Cont.)

❏ *Don't use a didactic video*. Locate video that will engage the participant in ways beyond traditional reading materials and lecture. The best documentaries, for example, use great visuals, sounds, narration, and storytelling. Video will satisfy the concrete experience of Kolb's learning circle. An instructional video can also assist with abstract conceptualization, but you don't want to simply show another talking head (unless the lecturer is particularly gifted).

❏ *Use existing videos*. Research appropriate videos on sites like http://www.youtube.com.

❏ *Embed the video in PowerPoint.* Embedding the video avoids the distraction of clicking on a link and then seeing advertisements on YouTube or other sites. To embed, you will need to download the video. Embedding also allows you to quickly edit the video in PowerPoint. NOTE: You may only use a video with a .wmv, .mp4, or .mpg file extension within PowerPoint.

❏ *Practice using the video*. We all have had the experience of a video that didn't work. Practice to ensure the file type will work on the computer you're going to use during the session. Run through the entire video to ensure it doesn't have any playback issues.

❏ *Choose a video with excellent production values*. Consider the production values. Is the video of high quality? Does it have good sound? Is the video illustrative of your point?

❏ *Use black slides and automatic playback.* Insert a black slide before the video slide or have a video title slide. Insert the video on a black slide with no title or words. Select automatic playback (instead of playback on a click). That way, you can use a presentation mouse to move from the black slide to the next slide and the video will begin playing automatically (without having to click on the video at the lectern).

❏ *Provide closure*. Debrief the video or provide an opening that explains why you are using it. Just like any other learning activity, the point of the video should be clear to your learners. If it's not, please ensure you explain the video's purpose.

Guidelines for Using Learning Games

❏ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the learning game will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❏ *Prepare and practice*. Prepare and practice with delivery and any materials or props that will help in creating or setting the game's theme.

❏ *Be creative*. Determine whether you will use PowerPoint, sound, video, or change the look and feel of the classroom with props, costumes, or set pieces. If you're going to play Jeopardy, for example, consider using the show's music. A good learning game should have visuals, potentially a "host" (e.g., Alex Trebek), game show music, prizes, and excitement.

❏ *Give clear instructions*. Provide clear instructions about the game rules. If using PowerPoint, provide the rules in succinct form on a slide. Consider using a handout with the rules on them.

❏ *Debrief after the game*: The game itself may simply be a test of information. In that case, a long debrief is not necessary. However, if the game's purpose is not clear, consider asking these questions: (1) what happened?; (2) why?; and (3) what does it mean?

Guidelines for Using Object Based Learning or Inquiry

❐ *Connect to learning objective.* Ensure the object based inquiry will assist the participants in achieving a learning objective.

❐ *Assess learning outcomes and goals:* Identify the core concepts you want your participants to conceptualize. Also identify the tasks you want your participants to experience (e.g., problem-solving, peer-to-peer interaction, abstract thinking, etc.). The goal is transformative learning.

❐ *Select suitable object(s):* Identify the object(s) that would be most effective in accomplishing your goals for the class. For judges, select something that is captivating because the object(s) will become the central focus for them to construct knowledge and meaning.

❐ *Gain access:* Define how and where the participants will access the object(s). You may provide the object yourself or organize a visit to a museum or library. In many cases, you can find classrooms at the site of the object-based learning opportunity.

❐ *Consider methods for engagement:* Define how your participants will interact with the object(s). Encourage them to learn through close observations, tactile experiences, and inquiry. You can use various approaches:

  ❐ Leading a classroom discussion with open-ended questions

  ❐ Organizing small group projects

  ❐ Allowing for creative expression of the participants' ideas (e.g., painting, drawing, etc.)

  ❐ Engaging the participants in visual-thinking strategies

  ❐ Using technology (e.g., providing opportunities for 3-D printing or virtual reality). *See* University of Miami: https://tinyurl.com/Object-Based-Learning

❐ *Provide closure*. Debrief the object-based learning exercise. Just like any other learning activity, the point of the exercise should be clear to your learners.