

Brain break activities

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Photo: Blake McCarthy

1. Physical activity
2. Mental activity

Brain breaks are short breaks in instruction during which students participate in structured physical or mental activity. Brain breaks have been shown to positively impact academic performance, decrease boredom, increase enjoyment and desire to learn, and to assist with staying on task and attentiveness (Ferrer & Laughlin 2017).

Ideas for brain break activities:

Physical activity

If you notice that students are losing concentration in a very demanding session, a few moments of exercise can reset their attention. Try one of the following:

- 5-minute simple exercise break (How about doing a workout with [Batman?](#))
- 5-minute dance break (You can even try an [aerobic sequence](#) from the 70s)
- [5-minute yoga stretch](#)
- individual reflection during a walk outside: in addition to the reflection, you can also set students a small task to complete outside, e.g., to take a picture that relates to the set topic.

TIP: If you choose to engage students in physical exercise by sharing a video on your screen, don't forget to select the 'share sound' option.

Mental activity

Employ short fast-paced activities that stimulate curiosity to boost students' motivation and improve their mood.

- Kahoot: Play a quick game of Kahoot on a related - or not! - topic.
- Guess a brand: the clue can be a drawing on the Whiteboard, an object or a slogan given either by the teacher or by students to the rest of the class (ask to post answers in Chat).
- Create a word cloud: ask students to describe something in one word and enter their word in e.g., a TurningPoint poll to create a quick visualisation of possible solutions.
- Treasure hunt (physical): this activity has many variations - it can work as an individual or a group task. Set students a challenge to find a set of items in their homes and show them to the rest of the class - e.g., 5 yellow items, 6 specific items that you post on the screen, 3 objects by a P-brand (any brand with a name that starts with a P would count).
- Treasure hunt (virtual): ask students to find 3-4 bits of information that appear somewhere on a company's website.
- 'Speed dating': set a question or a task (e.g., create a 30-second sales pitch), give students 2-3 minutes of thinking time to prepare and then send them out into automatically allocated breakout rooms with 2 participants. After 2-3 minutes, re-create the rooms. Do several rounds, then bring everyone back into the main session and follow up on the activity in plenum.
- Whiteboard splash: ask students a question and write their contributions on the whiteboard - e.g., find alternative uses of a plastic bag.
- Quick polls: ask students a series of 'This or that?' questions, and remember to keep the pace quite fast. NB: 'This or that' questions are aimed at revealing personal preferences, with no right or wrong answers: you can go broad or adjust questions to suit a particular topic - e.g., asking about the student awareness of brands, or preferred shops, or perceived appeal of certain TV ads. These can serve as a prompt for further discussion of the uncovered trends.

References

Michelle E. Ferrer & David D. Laughlin (2017) Increasing College Students' Engagement and Physical Activity with Classroom Brain Breaks, *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 88:3, 53-56, DOI: 10.1080/07303084.2017.1260945