KEEPING STUDENTS ENGAGED

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Mind Wandering

- Excerpts from “The Brain”, Discover Magazine, July/August 2009

“I am going to do my best to hold your attention until the very last word of this column. Actually, I know it’s futile. Along the way, your mind will wander off, then return, then drift away again. ... Mind wandering is not necessarily the sign of a boring column. It’s just one of those things that makes us human.”

POWERPOINT

- Allows you to have continuous *eye contact* with your students
- Frees students to *think* about what you are saying rather than frantically copying it all down
- Lets you use *color* *sound effects* *animations* *graphics*
When you have your text already typed on PowerPoint it’s easy to just read the slides and go too fast and entirely lose the attention of the students who don’t have to pay attention anyway because the notes are all online for them to go back to and look at later if they need them...

Forcing the students to take notes ensures that they continue to pay attention and don’t fog out

“The only way to keep the students engaged is to be engaged myself”
People have many different strategies for keeping students engaged... experiment and find what works for you.

It’s often not what you do, but how you do it.
**My PowerPoint/Blackboard Strategy**

- I present formulas, graphics, and problems on PowerPoint, work through solutions on the board.

- Distribute PowerPoint slides as handouts, but make a deal at the beginning of the semester that if I start seeing tops of heads I won’t distribute the slides.

- I print out the slides with note lines on the side, encouraging them to make their own comments.
Think about a course you’ve taken in which you were particularly engaged during class. What did the TF/professor do to keep you so engaged?
Ways to make students actively engaged in class:

1. Be enthusiastic and excited about the material
2. Use examples that are interesting and relevant to the students
3. Maintain eye contact and keep the focus on the students
4. Teach concepts students will be tested on or need for homework and make this clear
5. Make the students think
6. Conduct live demos, involve the students
7. Encourage and find ways to stimulate participation

Write down one concrete strategy you plan to use to make your students actively engaged in your class.
MAKE STUDENTS THINK!

- Give the students something *mentally active* to do… don’t let them just passively listen to you talk

- Give them something to think about and *ensure that they actually think*
  - Ask students to write down an answer, guess, or idea
  - Randomly generate a name to be called on
  - Use Clickers/Personal Response System
  - Ask students to discuss in pairs/groups and walk around listening to conversations
  - Randomly choose someone from each group to report back to the class
  - Regularly ask for and encourage questions/comments/thoughts
Involved Students = Engaged Students

- Involve your students in any way you can
- Ex// Random Walk

![Random Walk Graph]

- RED = +1
- BLACK = −1

- Make things into games or fun competitions
STIMULATE PARTICIPATION

- Set the tone early...
  - First Class
    - Have them introduce themselves (to you and to their classmates)
    - Make it clear *immediately* that you want them to talk
  - Before Each Class
    - Talk to them informally before class
    - Try to get the class talking about other things before “7-after” to make them comfortable talking

- Learn names! (isites class facebook if needed)

- Ask questions and...
  - WAIT for the students to answer
  - NEVER treat any response as “stupid”
To Limit Mind Wandering...
(Just in case your minds were wandering)

- **Variety**
  - PowerPoint/Blackboard
  - Lecture/Activities

- **Relevance**
  - Topics that the students will be interested in – make students *want* to pay attention
  - Topics they need to know for the course – make students feel like they *need* to pay attention

- **Make Them Think**
  - Give them reasons to think about what you are teaching and they will be less likely to think about other things
  - Make them express their thoughts to ensure they are actually thinking

- **Involve Them**
  - Activities, participation, group work

- **Bring Their Focus Back**
  - Ask a question that requires a response from everyone
  - Introduce important things as important (loudly)