

Activities and breaks in lectures

1. Briefing students

You must brief your students for breaks and activities by telling them

- exactly what you want them to do
- why you are asking them to do this
- how much time they have for the break or activity
- what the outcome will be
- to watch or listen for the signal you will use to bring the break or activity to a close

2. Examples of activities and breaks

Rest

In cramped conditions or after a long time, a rest is helpful, especially if people can move, stretch etc.

Say, *'Take a break for one minute. Move around if you want to.'*

Read notes

Say, *'Take two minutes to look through your notes. Check them, fill any gaps and make sure you understand them.'*

Read another student's notes

Say, *'Swap notes with the person next to you and see what s/he has written down. Ask him/her to clarify anything you're not clear about.'*

You may spot things you can add to your own notes when you get them back. You've got 3 minutes to do this.'

Write down a question, either on your own or in pairs

Say, *'I'd like you to write down at least two questions you have at this point in the lecture. Get each question exactly right so that it addresses what you're really interested in or confused about. You've got 3 minutes to do this.'*

Ask your question

Say, *'Take the questions you have written down and ask them of people all around you until you have satisfactory answers. 3 minutes.'*

Do a calculation, draw; construct a graph from this equation/data

Say, *'Now do this one. You've got five minutes. Check it out with the person next to you when you finish. Ask them if you get stuck, but not until they've finished.'*

Tackle a problem	As above or say, <i>'Write down the stages of how you would go about tackling this problem.'</i>
Read Something	Say, <i>'Read this passage, newspaper article, case, account on the handout. You have 3 / 5 / 7 minutes.'</i> Or say, <i>'Read the extract and discuss a question in pairs (or in threes or fours, etc).'</i>
Apply a concept	Say, <i>'Analyse this data set / this extract from a newspaper / journal, using the concepts I've described. You have 5 minutes'</i> .
Take a short test	Say, <i>'Here are three questions. Do them on your own for 5 minutes, then you'll swap them with your neighbour for 2 minutes. Then I'll explain any answers and you will correct the paper in front of you and then pass it back.'</i>
Quiet time (Reflection)	Say, <i>'Take 2 minutes quiet time to think about what we've done so far. Stay silent so as not to interfere with others' reflections.'</i>
Planning	Say, <i>'Take 2 minutes to plan out what further work you need to do, what you need to read, try out or get practise on for this topic.'</i>
Work on an uncompleted handout	Say, <i>'Now we've done the first three cells of the diagram / table, see if you can fill the rest in by yourself. You've got 5 minutes.'</i>
Adding points	Say, <i>'Now we've identified two problems with this policy, see if you can identify another two problems. You've got 3 minutes'</i> .
Draw / complete a diagram	Say, <i>'Spend two minutes labelling this diagram without looking at your notes from last week. We'll then check to see if you're right.'</i> Alternatively, you can give students a half-complete diagram (say, an initial equilibrium position), and then get them to complete the diagram. You can then go through it so that they can check that their answers are correct.
Complete a mathematical proof / demonstration	Before completing a mathematical argument on the board / OHP / PowerPoint display, ask the students to complete it. Then, when you complete it, they can then check their answer against yours.
Put on a video	Videos are very useful to illustrate points in a lecture. A short clip from the Money Programme / Newsnight / Channel 4 News, etc. can help to bring policy arguments alive. Keep the clip short: normally about 5 minutes is enough. They also provide a break and a change of pace. Alternatively, show them a cartoon, or a comic sketch. Even though it has no relevance to the subject, the students will get a break and this improves concentration in the rest of the lecture.
Read the students a short story / poem / newspaper clipping	This can be relevant to the subject, or merely seen as a break. Again, the break will help to aid concentration in the remainder of the lecture (enabling <i>more</i> to be learnt).