

Tips for Teaching in Flexible Learning Spaces

Adapted in part from: <https://cei.umn.edu/support-services/tutorials/active-learning-classrooms>

Flexible learning spaces, in contrast to traditional classrooms, facilitate a wide variety of teaching and learning activities. They have mobile furniture and a wide range of available technologies, both features that can support student-centered instruction. Below are ten tips for teaching in these 21st century spaces.

1. **Minimize in-class content.** Take advantage of the flexibility of the space by using active pedagogies during class meeting times. Deliver content out of class (e.g. online).
2. **Create a focal point.** To overcome the challenge of students facing away from you and each other, create a focal point to which everyone can turn when you need to address the whole group. Also, have students either stand where they are or come to your focal point when they speak.
3. **Use a cue to regain students' attention.** Classrooms can get noisy when students are actively engaged. Use a cue such as, "clap once if you can hear my voice" to regain attention. Use a microphone (have students do this as well)
4. **Use pictures to show students how to arrange the room.** Students will get used to the arrangements you use and will be able to get into those arrangements quickly within just a class meeting or two.
5. **Carefully plan lessons that are challenging, but doable and take the full amount of time to complete.** Use PowerPoints animations to time activities so you stay on track.
6. **Minimize distractions.** Flexible learning spaces introduce numerous distractions that can be debilitating to some students. Minimize distractions by speaking only when everyone is quiet, asking students to close their devices at certain times, incorporating "quiet" time, etc.
7. **Limit groups to one handout or device.** To increase accountability and ensure students stay on task, limit groups to one handout or device.
8. **Circulate the room.** This increases accountability and allows you an opportunity to hear how the groups are doing. Don't hesitate to approach groups to ask how they are progressing.
9. **Hold students accountable before, during, and after the activity.** Within their groups and on their own, make sure students know the purpose, task, and grading criteria for each assignment.
10. **Embrace the chaos.** Noise can indicate that groups are working well together. A room with desks left arranged in a chaotic layout indicate that an active pedagogy was used. These are good indications that learning has taken place!



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