
Tip sheet – Authentic and Active Learning

The purpose of this tip sheet is to stimulate authentic and active learning ideas that you can implement in your teaching. This tip sheet builds on the principles for active and authentic learning introduced in the good practice guide on [active, engaged and collaborative learning](#) (activities that are student focussed, inquiry-oriented, employ critical thinking, interactive and dialogical, and that develop a sense of community); the good practice guide [student centred learning](#) (especially, positioning students as partners in their learning); and the good practice guide [students are engaged in authentic and experiential learning](#) (authentic assessment, explicit scaffolding for WIL, the development of Graduate Qualities, and industry/disciplinary thinking and practice).

Authentic teaching for authentic learning

Authentic learning starts with authentic teaching, and that starts with being thoughtful about what authentic means to you personally, and within your professional and discipline contexts. It would be insincere to *tell* you what authentic and active learning (and teaching) should be like! Likewise, you can ask the students what authentic learning means or looks like to them. In doing this, you are already enacting a genuinely ‘active’ learning and active teaching.

A relational approach

Consider your relationship with your students and the subject matter. A [relational and authentic approach to teaching](#) considers the learning experience holistically. As an educator it is important to approach your teaching by reflecting on how you like to be taught and how this might differ from those around you and your students. Think about a time recently where you needed to learn something, how did you feel? What would you have changed?

More and more, I found myself responding with my own stories – stories that have made a difference in my teaching and living – and how these experiences have shaped my teaching philosophy. Where before I was reluctant to write along with my students, I found, in time, to be writing with them. Where before I was hesitant to share my life stories, I found myself talking more about myself. (Kaplan, 2000)

Students usually feel more committed to a course where the instructor’s own views or approach to a topic are made clear. ... personal interventions have to be carefully judged, but can make a big difference to student commitment and participation. (Bates, 2019)

Your teaching philosophy

A good place to start thinking about authentic teaching is to consider and be explicit about your own teaching philosophy. [We teach who we are](#), after all, and being transparent with students about what moves us and draws us in our teaching demonstrates self-awareness as fundamental to both teaching and learning. Your [teaching philosophy statement](#) (see Sokal, Friesen & Taylor, 2002) can be built in a webpage or ePortfolio page, then shared as a link in the FLO site, perhaps alongside your welcome message. See this tip sheet on [using ePortfolios and Mahara in FLO](#) for more information.

Locate yourself professionally

You are the face of Flinders, but you are also the face of the industry or professional context for the discipline you are teaching in. Share your passion, your story, your networks, your continued professional practice and learning. Talk about what ‘good practice’ means to you and be explicit about the differences of perspective in your field. What are the debates, and where do you stand?

Share the learning

In relational and authentic teaching, it is important to be aware you are co-constructing the learning environment with your students. When planning your teaching consider, using approaches that [humanise](#)

[the learning process](#) and recognise the shared challenges of both learning and the discipline you are teaching. Some techniques you can use to do this include:

- **Provide “think-it-through” videos and documents** that unpack and demystify the process and acknowledge challenges, and remind students that even established experts have a process of working through a task. See this example here in module 5 of the [Practice examples for the Guidelines for Digital Learning](#) site.
- **Support students to see each other’s work** in progress and/or in polished form. If you are working on a research project or paper yourself, show your own work in progress and remind them that all research involves overcoming challenges and unexpected events.
- **Involve the students.** Ask - what do you need? What do you think? What are you passionate about?

Active, authentic online learning spaces

Just like a physical teaching space, your FLO site has both fixed and customisable elements. Just as we adjust the physical space of our classroom to make student feel comfortable and reflect who we are, we should have the same [considerations for our online spaces](#).

A welcoming space

First impressions count! You can welcome new students to the topic by [creating a welcome video](#), writing a personal message, or setting some text at the top of your FLO site and reflecting on this when you begin any synchronous teaching sessions. Creating an inclusive and collaborative learning environment also considers the needs of indigenous and culturally diverse learners - see [Tip sheet - Culturally responsive digital learning](#).

An experiential space

The learning environment should be professional, but also [humanised as much as possible](#). The tip sheet [Supporting students to successfully engage in with the topic](#) takes you through the process of creating a FLO site that considers the student’s experience.

Tools as ‘spaces’ for interaction

You can think of tools within your FLO site as authentic and active spaces where interaction occurs. For instance, a [Collaborate session](#) is a space for real-time, face-to-face (even while virtual) dialogue within a group. Wherever possible, choose tools that are ‘core’ within the [FLO eco-System](#) - the learning technology suite available at Flinders. These spaces, even while they are hosted within the walls of the learning management system (LMS) and could therefore be considered inauthentic to the ‘real’ world, can nevertheless be used authentically. For instance, a FLO forum can be used to simulate a ‘real-world’ forum such as the Conversation. If you want to [use non-FLO tools in your teaching, check these considerations](#).

Active, authentic learning activities

Learning by doing is considered an effective way to learn. However, time, resources and safety prevent most of us all from building rocket ships in our classroom or going on a field trip every week but there are a wide range of practical ways we can use online tools and teaching techniques to both bring the world into the classroom, and bring the classroom out in to the world.

Work-integrated learning (WIL)

The ultimate form of authentic, active learning is work-integrated learning (WIL). At Flinders, WIL is the broad term referring to any structured and purposefully designed learning and assessment activity in a course curriculum that integrates theory with the practice of work. This encompasses clinical placements, internships, field education and industry projects, and can take place within or outside of the university

environment. See more here on the [WIL staff web page](#) and see examples in the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) [collection of WIL resources](#).

Designing authentic assessment

The [Tip sheet - Authentic Assessment](#) provides loads of examples of how to implement authentic activity in your topic. For an overview of work-integrated learning types, see a [Practical Typology of Authentic Work-Integrated Learning Activities and Assessments](#) (Kaider, Hains-Wesson & Young, 2017) – skip to page 159. Working back from the assessment forms and artefacts, you can also implement authentic *processes* in your topic activities – for instance project-based and team-based processes. As an authentic teaching approach, consider [designing authentically from place](#). For instance, when designing a lab-based exercise, sit in the lab and imagine the student stepping through the process.

Simulation-based learning

Simulation, including the use of real-world prompts for assessment items, can be done using both complex tools such as Multi-media studios, medical simulation labs or trading rooms. Examples from Flinders include the [Northern Territory simulation learning environment](#) and the [Flinders Business Trading Room](#). Ask in your College if it is possible to tour the facilities to see the learning in action. It is also possible to employ low fidelity simulations in your topic using existing resources – for instance:

- **Collect and use research data** from your own research and ask students to work with you on solving a problem. See this archived [citizen science](#) example from Biology called [Saving Nemo](#). (NOTE: you will need to put careful ethics into place for research projects with students).
- **Use actual and hypothetical issues** to simulate real-world engagements – see for instance this [Model Diplomacy collection](#) of cases providing an experience of policy-making.
- **Turn your groupwork into teamwork** by setting up small groups to role-play defined, real-life professional roles and work together as a multi-disciplinary team, with each team member playing out their role in context.
- **Use the recording rooms** to generate simulated environments for your lectures. There are bookable rooms in Social Sciences South and Sturt with ‘green screen’ technology, which replaces the green wall behind you with a backdrop of your choice (PowerPoint presentation, images, video, websites, etc.) [See details and how to book here](#).

Working with real artefacts and media

Bring the world into the classroom by using or creating artefacts relevant to your discipline. These can be drawn from historical affairs, current affairs, or affairs of the imagination. Holistically, you can use timelines to trace trajectories between past, present and possible future scenarios. Other ideas:

- **Create artefacts for use later in the real world.** Making an [educational artefact](#) can be an exercise in synthesising, condensing and translating a lot of information and learning into a handy take-away reference that students can actually use in the workplace - a checklist, or a collection of key resources, for instance.
- **Employ object-based learning (OBL).** [OBL](#) is a ‘hands-on’ approach to education that draws on active and experiential learning models and constructivist understandings of knowledge production. In practice, students encounter and engage with objects in a structured learning environment, where objects are used in their material form as the primary medium for learning. See the [Object-based learning \(OBL\) toolkit](#) hosted by the Flinders University Museum of Art.

References and selected recommended resources

Tony Bates, 2019, [Teaching in a Digital Age](#)

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