Five Gears for Activating Learning:

Some Gear-by-Gear Questions for Faculty

*Note: think of the following questions as a kind of checklist. We designed them to provide faculty with an overview of the many ways to activate student learning in their courses. When your students are brilliantly demonstrating what they are learning, chances are good that all five gears are fully engaged. But if your students are falling short of your expectations, use this list to see whether there is something more you might do to activate their learning.*

*For more about the Five Gears, see* [www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/academic-first-year-experiences/five-gears-teaching-learning-group-csun](https://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/academic-first-year-experiences/five-gears-teaching-learning-group-csun)

# Motivating learning

1. How do you relate your course to student career aspirations?
2. What small tasks placed early in your course can pave the way for students to establish expectations of success for learning and understanding course content?
3. How do you help students see that you are an ally who supports their efforts?

# Organizing knowledge

1. What overarching themes tie all your course ideas together? How do you make them explicit to your students? How does the syllabus articulate them?
2. How do you keep track of course content? Beginning with your own, what strategies for organizing knowledge can you share with your students?
3. When students complete your course, will they be able to create a one-page diagram of the big ideas from the course?

**Connecting prior knowledge**

1. If your course has a prerequisite, how can you use that as a jumping-off point for students?
2. In your experience, what prior knowledge do students typically bring to your course? What kinds of prior knowledge do you hope they will bring? (Prior knowledge may include learning from other courses in the major, from courses outside the major, and from life experiences.)
3. What practical/personal student experience can you tie in to current course content?
4. What prior knowledge would you want to address as potentially misleading for students—knowledge that may need to be reconceived or supplanted? How will you help students who are missing essential prior knowledge?
5. If your students are online novices, what technology component of your course is likely to be most accessible or familiar to them?
6. What aspect(s) of your course will be least familiar to your students? How will you address them?

**Practicing with feedback**

1. How can you use technology to embed feedback so students can practice and self-test?
2. From your previous experiences with teaching this course, where will students need the most targeted practice and feedback?
3. How can you use technology and peer-to-peer learning to manage your workload in this course?
4. How do you balance between timely feedback and feedback that is detailed/ complete?
5. How will you “close the feedback loop”—that is, how will you ensure that your students understand your feedback and can put it into practice?

**Developing mastery**

1. What opportunities does your course provide for students to reflect on (i.e., have an internal conversation with themselves about) what they have/haven’t learned?
2. How often do you ask students to check in with themselves about the effectiveness of their study strategies?
3. How do you use course SLOs to help students gauge course mastery?
4. What structures do you have for students to direct/control the direction of their own learning?