

Changing Students' State of Mind

Even adults learners are unable to pay full attention in a learning situation for more than about 15 minutes. At that point, they need a change and, ideally, movement of some sort. These are some ways to help change the learners' state. Breaking the learning into shorter segments also provides the benefit of more beginnings and ends—important because information in the middle tends to be remembered less well.

1. Change where you stand in the room.
2. Use props: hat, beach ball globe, a 3-D model, an interesting pointer, etc.
3. Incorporate humor: a joke or cartoon, a funny prop; have students do a joke share. (See Paper #4 in “Emotion and Learning” section of this website.)
4. Do a magic trick. It can be sophisticated or simple—even funny and obvious.
5. Give students a 60-second stretching break (use music).
6. Have students do some cross-lateral (cross-body) stretches.
7. Have students change seats or groups.
8. Use music or sound effects: whistle, chimes, etc.
9. Hold up an object that pertains to what you're doing. Ask students to figure out the connection between an object and a concept (“A main idea is like an artichoke because...”; “In what way are a paragraph and this chocolate chip cookie similar?”).
10. Have students work in groups or pairs.
11. Start class with a short activity to jumpstart students' brains.
12. Tell a story; weave information together using a story; have students create a “story.”
13. Set information to be learned to a familiar tune or rhyme (“Row, Row, Row Your Boat”).
14. Use game formats to help students learn or review information.
15. Ask a compelling question; pose a problem to be solved.
16. Use “Repeat after me . . .” as part of the review process.
17. Use fragrances: peppermint and lemon are energizing; lavender is calming.
18. Have students take a few minutes to breathe deeply.
19. Have students move—have them stretch, form groups, “vote with their feet,” etc.
20. Use metaphors when explaining concepts.
21. Ask for a show of hands or have students respond by holding up response cards.
22. Hold class outside or move to a different location.
23. Create classroom traditions, such as greeting each other, high fives, ending with an affirmation, etc. Let students decide what it will be.
24. Show a pertinent video clip or play a relevant sound bite. YouTube and other websites offer myriad possibilities.
25. Change the configuration of the classroom periodically. Rearrange the chairs, tables, or arm-tablet chairs.
26. Vary the lighting in the room during a class session.
27. Give students a choice of activities, sequence of activities, approach, and so forth.

