

JANET RANKIN: The lightning round is a nice interactive technique that I use in my class. And what we do is I divide the group into usually two teams, two sides, and I have them face each other.

So you can have them face each other in two parallel lines, or you can have an inner circle and an outer circle, as long as one person is facing only one other person.

And then you can do it on a topic similar to the debate where there's really two sides and you ask the one side to take one side and the other side to take another side. But the difference with this is that the communication is only between the student and the student that he or she is facing, and they only have one or two minutes for the interaction.

So one student gets to speak for say, it's a minute, and the other student gets to respond for a minute. And then after that's over, I ask one line to shift, or one circle to take a step to the right or the left, and now each person has a new partner that they speak with.

Generally speaking, if you had one row be the pro and the other row be the con, then for the next iteration, you would switch roles. So there would be the con and the pro.

The advantages of this technique are that the students get to hear a lot of different opinions from a lot of different students. The fact that it takes only two minutes at most for each interaction means that you can do it several times, four times, five times. If you do it five times, it's only about 10 minutes, maybe 13 minutes with some time to translate.

So it's a pretty quick exercise. And by doing this lightning round, students can get many different perspectives from other students.

The other kind of question you can ask with a lightning round is you can ask a question, maybe you give students a few minutes beforehand to do a calculation or to solve a particular kind of problem.

And then you say, OK, you have one minute to explain how you did the problem to your partner. And your partner has one minute to explain how he or she did the problem to you.

And again, that lets students see other students' approaches, and it lets them think about their own approach in the context of the other person's approach.

You also tell them they're allowed to change the way they think about the problem, or to think about the response, based on what they've heard in their previous pairing. So it lets students kind of iterate and develop their opinions kind of as they go.

A couple of disadvantages of the technique are that it's very, very noisy. So students are speaking with each other. They're really only about a foot apart, and everyone is speaking at the same time.

STUDENT: I originally thought there was going to be an increase, but then I learned that in the 1870's, there was like, a mini ice age.

JANET RANKIN: So depending on the class, depending on the personalities, depending on the people in the class, it may not be such a great technique. But the advantage is that it really gets everybody up. It gets everybody moving, even people that are really shy.

There's virtually nobody that will stand there for a minute and not say anything. Even people that are extremely shy are generally willing to talk with one other person.

And since you can't hear anything about what's going on in other groups or even the instructor can't hear what's going on, it's a fairly safe conversational situation. So that is an advantage of it.

The thing I like about it the most is that it gets students up. It gives them the opportunity to formulate an argument and to listen to the argument of others and then put their opinion, or argument, or answer in the context of other answers. And it lets them hear the opinions and responses of a lot of their peers in a very short period of time.

After I finish the lightning round, I always give students a minute, or two minutes, three minutes to sort of sit down and reflect on the exercise, what they learned, if their answer changed, how it changed, why it changed.

And then we usually do a large group report out to say, I thought this going in, but I heard from so-and-so and this is what I think now. So we do a little bit of a report out.

Also because of the fact that as the instructor, since you can't hear with students are saying, you want to know if there's some big misconception that's been propagated during the activity, and you would want to address that. So the report out for that exercise can be particularly important.

