Engage Students from the Start: Implementing Meaningful Warm-up Activities
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Hannah Jardine, Ph.D.  
hjardine@american.edu

Marissa Stewart, Ph.D.  
stewartmc@cua.edu

The Value of Warm-up Activities
- Cognitive – warm-ups can activate prior knowledge, spark curiosity, and monitor learning and progress
- Logistical – hold students accountable to pre-class work and provide instructor time for administration
- Social – create a sense of belonging and connect to students’ lived experiences

How Can You Use Warm-up Activities in Your Classes? (with sample prompts)

(1) Warm-ups Activate Prior Knowledge – When students make connections with relevant prior knowledge from previous courses or their own lives, they are more likely to retain new knowledge.
  - Why do you think…?
  - What do you think of when you hear…?
  - What do you know about…?
  - List all of the words that come to mind when I say [term/concept].

(2) Warm-ups as Formative Assessment – Providing students with as many opportunities as possible to retrieve and use information supports long-term retention and deeper understanding. Immediate feedback helps instructors and students know where to focus their efforts moving forward.
  - What were the main topics we covered in our last class session?
  - How would you define/explain this concept to a non-expert?
  - What is the significance of this topic (from a homework assignment, class session, etc.)?
  - What questions do you still have about the content covered in previous classes?

(3) Warm-ups as Accountability Measures – Starting class by connecting to pre-class readings or other assignments can help to hold students accountable to coming to class prepared.
  - What is one question you have after today’s readings?
  - What are the highlights of the reading for today or work you completed for today?
  - How do the assigned readings connect with what we discussed last class?
  - What is one key takeaway you gained from the assigned video?

(4) Warm-ups Build Community – By asking students to share their emotions, feelings, opinions, or personal lived experiences, you can help create a sense of belonging for students and increase their motivation to learn.
  - Think of a time when…
  - What are your thoughts on…
  - Have you ever experienced…
  - How do you feel about…

(5) Warm-ups Support Interaction – Regularly integrating opportunities where students are engaged in interactive and collaborative activities creates an inclusive learning environment by centering social presence.
  - Share with a partner…
  - Form a small group and think about…
  - Turn to the person next to you and talk about…
  - Work with the people around you to…

How might you apply these ideas and suggestions to create meaningful warm-up activities in your course(s)?