

# The ToolBox

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A Teaching and Learning Resource for the Faculty of Indiana Wesleyan University



## A Bunch of Teaching Strategies

This edition of *The ToolBox* will simply provide a “bunch of teaching strategies” for use by faculty. These strategies have been selected based upon the ease with which they can be transported into the classroom and used in a variety of disciplinary content areas. As a disclaimer, these strategies come from a variety of sources and conversations—not all can be easily traced or recalled. Sources have been cited where they are known.

### A “Sweet” Way to Create Groups

**T**he “sweet way” begins as students arrive for class. They are asked to choose their favorite candy bar from a large bowl of miniatures (e.g., Snickers, Butterfinger, Milky Way). As class begins, students are then given the direction to create groups of four with the condition that each group must include members representing four different candy bar brands. Alternatively, you could suggest that students form a group of four with people who share their taste in candy bars (i.e., same choices). Let the groups begin!

### Minute Fingers

**W**hen students participate in group activities, it is often difficult for faculty members to accurately estimate the amount of classroom time that is appropriate for completing assigned tasks. Some groups finish before others, and in other situations, we simply underestimate or overestimate the amount of time that it will take for a group to organize themselves and work together toward a common goal.

When the allotted time expires, and you notice that some of the groups have finished while others are still working, use the “minute fingers” technique. Ask each group to discuss how many additional minutes they will need (between 1 and 5) and then designate one person as their spokesperson. That person will raise a hand with the corresponding number of fingers extended to designate additional minutes needed. Survey the group and announce an average that meets the additional time needs of the groups in the class. (From Bruce Wellman and Bob Garmston in *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*, 1999).

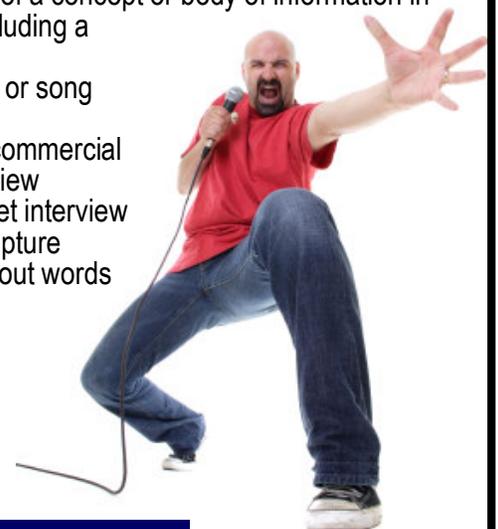
### The Fickle Finger of Fate

**W**hen students work in groups, there is often a need to designate specific individuals to fulfill varied roles. One way to facilitate this process is to bring the “fickle finger of fate” into play. After students are in groups, class members are asked to raise their right hand with the index finger extended. On the count of three, they are directed to point to the person in their group whom they feel would be the best possible recorder for the group’s discussion. That person inherits the role of recorder. As a way of adding a positive spin to being designated as the recorder, that individual is given the privilege of choosing the person in their group who will serve as their spokesperson.

### Picture This – Or Sing It

**A**s a way of capitalizing on the multiple intelligences in your classrooms, assign students to small groups and ask them to capture the major aspects of a concept or body of information in varied formats including a

- Poster
- Rap, poem, or song
- Brief drama
- Television commercial
- News interview
- On-the-street interview
- Human sculpture
- Picture without words



# More Strategies ...

## Group Response Cards

**T**his strategy combines small group consensus building and the opportunity to gain a sense of the total group's response to issues of discussion. Each group of 3-5 students is provided with a series of response cards (e.g., Agree, Disagree, Not Sure). The faculty member then presents a scenario or problem situation for the class to consider and discuss in their small groups. At the signal, groups are asked to display their response cards. In this way, the faculty member can survey the responses and ask groups with certain responses (e.g., Agree) to state their reasons for their chosen response.

## You're a Poet and Don't Know It!

**A** great and often unexpected way of helping students to process and summarize newly acquired knowledge and skills is to encourage them to write poetry. One quick and easy type of poetry that students typically enjoy is the "cinquain". These are five line poems written in a number of formats. For example, one type of cinquain is written as follows:

- ◆ **Line 1: A title of one word or one subject**
- ◆ **Line 2: Two words about the subject**
- ◆ **Line 3: Three verbs that signify action**
- ◆ **Line 4: Four words telling about your feelings for line one (words or phrase)**
- ◆ **Line 5: A synonym for line one**

An example may be helpful. Consider the topic of "pizza" and the poem that emerges from our thoughts about this important topic:

**Pizza**  
**Cheesy, gooey**  
**Grab, chomp, savor**  
**Greasy pleasure and enjoyment**  
**Ecstasy**



The writing of cinquain poetry can provide a great change-of-pace classroom activity. At the end of a lecture, or section of course content, break the class into small groups and assign each group one key word or concept from which to develop a cinquain poem. Have the groups work together and then share the results of their creative thinking.

## The Name Game

**D**oesn't it feel great when you meet someone once and they remember your name? Our students feel the same way. But how do we go about the process of remembering the names of students that we may only see once or twice a week? Here are some strategies:

- The old standby "Name Tent" that is placed on the table or desk each class
- Create a yearbook style roster with pictures
- Ask students to create an index card sized "Passport" that includes their picture, likes and dislikes, their major, and something unique or interesting about themselves
- On the first day of class, use the "Leave Them Alone" strategy. Tell the students that you are going to leave for five minutes. When you return, you expect each student to be able to introduce five other students on a first name basis and tell something interesting about the people they introduce. A class goal is to assure that all people are introduced at least once.

(National Teaching and Learning Forum: [www.ntlf.com](http://www.ntlf.com))

## Count Off

**A** common way of dividing a class into small groups is to ask the students to "count off" by fours, fives, sixes, etc. This technique often results in lackluster responses including delays and those who are not paying attention missing their number. Some ways to breathe new life into this process include:

- Asking students to count backwards (i.e., 5,4,3,2,1)
- Count in a language other than English (e.g., uno, dos, tres...)
- Challenge the whole class to count off in a specified period of time (e.g., 20 seconds)

## The Toolbox

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