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Designing Active Cognitive Tasks for Active Learning

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In this interactive workshop, we will introduce the concept of Active Cognitive Tasks (ACTs), a key component of active learning. We will then workshop your real teaching scenarios, giving you practice in designing ACTs and applying this theory to your teaching. Together we will design ACTs that you can really use.

ACTs are based on evidence from cognitive science about how students learn. If we specify the cognitive task for our students, they are more likely to engage actively with the learning process. Our most motivated students often create their own ACTs while reading articles or listening to lectures, but not all students will do so. If they don't, it results in a passive approach such that students may have the feeling of learning but without much actual learning.

Simple changes to the way we frame our activities can make a big difference by making our intended ACTs explicit. For example, listening to a lecture recording can be passive, but if we include an ACT such as asking students to think of real-world examples for the key concepts in the lecture, it encourages them to engage actively and retain their knowledge.

Online collaborative writing as used in this session is the type of activity we often use in the PGCTHE. This workshop is based on a session I delivered for the Active Learning Network's Global Festival of Active Learning in April 2022 and a chapter on ACTs in a forthcoming SEDA publication about active learning online.

By the end of this session, participants will have a wide-ranging set of ideas for designing ACTs in your own teaching.

