

Guidelines for lecturers

Student Engagement and Shy/Introverted Learners

Practical strategies for engaging shy learners

- Break learners into pairs or trios instead of large group discussions
- Use written reflections, polls, discussion boards, or digital tools (like Jamboard, Padlet, or Mentimeter)
- Avoid calling on learners immediately after asking a question. Use a reflective pause.
- Use protocols like “Round Robin” where everyone shares briefly in a set order
- Set clear expectations around respect, listening, and confidentiality
- Use low-stakes icebreakers (see bottom of page for e.g. of icebreaker activities: <https://studentengagement.cit.ie/goodstart/good-start-info-for-staff>) that don't require sharing personal info
- Assign roles like note-taker, researcher, or summarizer during group work
- Break tasks down step-by-step. Provide written directions
- They must participate, but let them choose whether that is written, verbal, or another form of participation
- Praise effort and growth privately and publicly when appropriate.
- Encourage risk-taking in low-stakes settings before expecting public contributions

Common strengths among shy/introverted learners

- Reflectiveness: Because introverts spend considerable time in their heads, they tend to think things through before acting
- Listening skills: Introverts prefer solitude over conversation, and this penchant for silence makes them natural listeners
- Independence: Introverts find comfort in aloneness. As a result, they often develop a sense of independence.
- Self-awareness: Introverts value quiet time, often spent in thought and reflection. Because of this, they can get to know themselves

more easily.

- Attention to detail: Introverted learners often notice details that others overlook and are meticulous in their work.

Common Learning traits among introverted/shy learners

- **Process information internally:** Introverts typically take more time to process new information, preferring to reflect on it before engaging in discussions. This means that while they may not be the first to raise their hand in class, they often have a deep, thorough understanding of the material
- **Take time to answer questions:** Introverts are thoughtful responders. They tend to prefer having time to reflect on questions and offer well-considered answers, rather than responding quickly under pressure.
- **Prefer learning alone:** Many introverts find that they learn best when working independently. They value quiet time to recharge their energy and focus on their own tasks, making activities like individual projects or self-paced learning highly effective for them.
- **Favor written communication:** Introverts often express themselves better in writing than in speaking. Written assignments or journaling can give them the space to share their thoughts and ideas more comfortably and effectively.
- **Thrive in structured environments:** Given their preference for independent work, introverts often excel when given clear structure and the freedom to manage their own time. They appreciate having control over how they engage with their learning activities

Challenges faced by shy/introverted learners

- **Fear of speaking up in class:** shy or introverted learners may avoid participating in large-group discussions due to fear of being judged, saying the wrong thing, or simply not being comfortable speaking in front of others. This can often be misinterpreted as a lack of interest or ability
- **Struggles with spontaneous activity:** They need more time to process information before responding. Being called on unexpectedly will be

stressful for them

- **Self-doubt and imposter syndrome:** Learners who are shy or introverted may be more prone to internalizing self-doubt especially if returning to study after a long break
- **They can be quiet and unassertive unless they feel safe and valued:** Introverts are sometimes drowned out by louder or more persistent voices. When they are quiet in class, it's often because they are thinking through their responses carefully. Other times they might have the best idea in the room, but they would rather not have to vie for attention to speak their minds.
- **Need time to recharge their social battery:** Whereas extroverts feel energized after social interactions, introverts need some time to regain their energy. It's not that they don't enjoy socializing just as much as extroverts do, they truly come to life when they are engaged in deep conversations. Introverts need space after group activities to recharge; if they are forced to sacrifice this they won't be operating at full capacity until they have had a break. They will work best when group work is paired with individual self-reflection.