

Kooshing the Envelope

Instructions: Bring a Koosh ball, stuffed animal, miniature class mascot, Nerf ball or any other soft object to class. Then use it to energize discussions, stimulate tactile-kinesthetic learners, and, most importantly, make learning fun. Below are some games you can play throughout a semester.

The Name Game is a variation of an icebreaker. On the first day of class start by tossing the ball around the room and having students introduce themselves when they catch the ball. On the second round of play, students state their name and call out another student's name before tossing it to him or her. The student then catches the ball restates his or her name and calls out another student's name and the game continues. In the final speed round, students simply start calling out names and tossing the ball around as fast as they can.

Good News is a game that helps get a class started in the right emotional state for learning. Simply put, the teacher asks if anyone has any good news to share. If a person does, the teacher tosses him or her the Koosh and that individual shares the good news. When finished, the Koosh is tossed to someone else who has good news to share.

Key Concepts is a Koosh toss game that can be played at the end of a class or prior to tests and exams (a quick 3 to 5 minute session prior to an exam can lower test anxiety and improve student performance) With content that is new to students, this activity may require stronger facilitation on the part of the instructor, but the goal would be to get students to list key concepts of what they are studying or have learned throughout a class.

The Process is a Koosh toss game that is similar to Key concepts, but instead the focus is on a process. For example, what is the writing process, or what is Monroe's Motivated Sequence? Toss the Koosh and let students explain the steps or the sequence.

Impromptu Speaking is a Koosh game that can be played in listening and speaking classrooms. A list of impromptu topics could be displayed on the board (or kept hidden by the instructor). Then either the teacher or fellow students can toss the ball to fellow classmates for random, impromptu speaking.

Muddiest Point is a variation on the classroom assessment technique (CAT). In this variation, rather than having students compose a one-minute paper or write down their muddiest point (the point that was most difficult for them to understand), teachers can employ the Koosh to ask these questions out loud.

Best thing is another variation on a Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT). But rather than focusing on what didn't work in class that day, this activity tells the teacher what worked well and can give some valuable formative feedback as to why.

Just Ask! is a variation on a discussion forum that is embedded into all of my online, hybrid, and web enhanced courses. Students know, that if they have a question, all they have to do is Just Ask. Using the Koosh, teachers can extend this into the first 5 minutes of a class in an attempt to identify student questions and concerns in a fun way.