

# The Least You Need To Know About Team-Based Learning:

Michael Sweet, Ph.D. – msweet@austin.utexas.edu

**Team-Based Learning:** a form of collaborative learning that consists of (A) Strategically-formed, permanent teams, (B) Readiness assurance, (C) Application activities, and (D) Peer evaluations. TBL has been implemented in every discipline and scaled to classes of 350. See video of TBL in real classrooms in this 12 minute video: <http://magenta.cit.utexas.edu/largeclasses/#tbl>

**A) Strategically-formed, permanent teams:** teams of 5-7 students in which student characteristics that make the course easier or more difficult are spread as evenly as possible across teams that last the entire term.

**B) Readiness assurance:** a four-step process that takes place at the beginning of each course module:

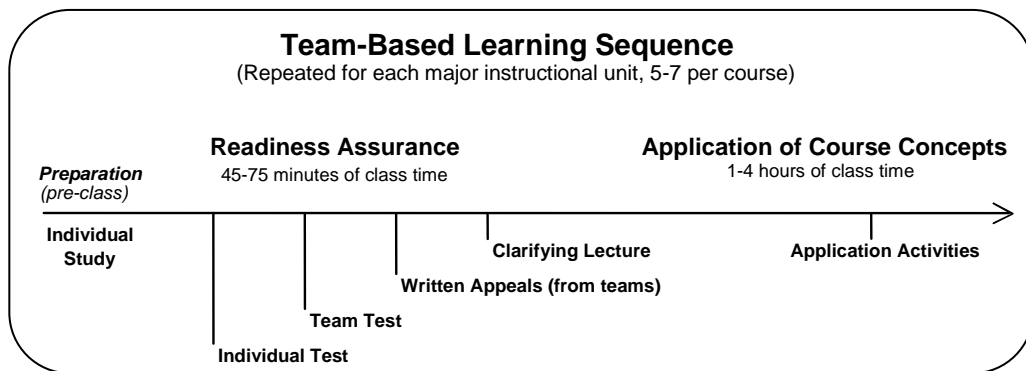
1. Pre-reading by students outside of class – increasingly includes podcasts and other forms of media
2. Individual readiness assessment test (IRAT) – short, basic, multiple-choice test over the preparation materials
3. Team readiness assessment test (tRAT) – once they turn in their individual tests, students then take the exact same test again, and must come to consensus on their team answers. **IMPORTANT:** teams must get immediate feedback on their performance, currently best achieved using "scratch off" forms called IF-ATs.
4. Appeals – When teams feel they can still make a case for their answers which were marked as incorrect, they can pull out their course materials and generate written appeals, which must consist of (a) a clear statement of argument, and (b) evidence cited from the preparation materials.

**The Readiness assurance process is followed by a clarifying lecture**, in which the teacher can target information that the tRAT scores show the students do not yet understand (e.g. "All the teams got questions 1-5 correct, so that material can be considered 'covered' but questions 6-10 were hit and miss, so let me explain that material a bit more.")

**C) Application activities:** carefully-designed activities also called "4 S" activities because they require teams to:

1. address a Significant problem that demonstrates a concepts usefulness
2. make a Specific choice among clear alternatives (e.g., Which of these is the best example of X? What is the most important piece of evidence in support of Y? Which statement would the author most agree with?)
3. work on the Same problem as other teams, so each team will care about the conclusions and rationales of other teams
4. report their decisions Simultaneously, so differences among teams can be explored for the most instructional effect. Can be accomplished by holding up notecards, having team representatives write on the board, using "clickers," etc..

Application activities can be graded or ungraded, and need not have a "correct" answer. Likewise, the TBL structure can be hung as an exoskeleton around individually-completed mid-terms, finals, paper assignments, and so on.



**If you remember nothing else from this page:** group papers and presentations are among the worst tasks one can give a group! The nature of these tasks makes the most rational approach to segment and distribute pieces of the work. The too-often demoralizing result is that each student has a different—and inevitably unequal—experience. The best task you can ask of a group is similar to that of a courtroom jury: given a tremendous amount of complex information, they must produce choice, and perhaps a very short rationale.

**D) Peer evaluation:** both mid-course and end-of-course team-mate feedback which is processed through the instructor and returned to the students with names removed. In many cases, this takes the form of students listing for each of their team-mates one thing they **Appreciate** about that team-mate and one thing they **Request**. Must contribute to student grade.

For more, see the TBL clearinghouse site at: [www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org)