Key Considerations for Effective SI Sessions: VPR-MOF
(Written by Homaira, presented at SI Conference)

1) **Variation** – include a variety of types of questions asked in your sessions (MCQ, short answers, discussion-based questions, chalkboard, etc.) and session strategies (jigsaw, mind-mapping, matrices) – this helps to cater to a diverse set of students in terms of what they prefer.

2) **Patience** – Response times – after you pose a question, pause and wait for students to have a chance to think about the answer. This helps to cater your sessions to students at all levels.

3) **Rewards** – Small gestures go a long way, such as thumbs up, or even saying ‘thanks for coming to the session’, or ‘thanks for participating’. Other students are observant about how you react to students participating and may encourage them to do so as well.

4) **Motivation** – Success encourages future participation. Students may wait for others in their groups to contribute rather than doing so themselves. To encourage active learning, vary the level of questions you ask so so some of them are easier to answer. More students are likely to answer these questions, and the feeling of successes serves as encouragement for them to participate gain in the future and fosters a community of active learning.

5) **Openness** – Avoid one-on-one conversations with students by re-directing questions to the entire group to ensure you are facilitating a discussion with everyone. A common strategy is to say: “Your friend says that [……], does everyone agree with this?” This encourages communication among students and active learning.

6) **Feedback** – Always ask for feedback. Across many semesters, each group of students you have will be quite diverse and you want to be able to cater to their academic needs. Make sure they know the sessions are for them - ensure that the content reflects areas they need more practice in and strategies used are conducive to the group. Feedback can be collected throughout the semester, especially in the beginning and towards the middle.

**Session Strategies:**

1) **Double Methods:** This strategy is effective for process-based courses. Have two groups of students go up to two separate chalkboards and write out their solution for a problem that they came up with together in their individual groups. Together, both groups turn around the chalkboard to reveal to each other and everyone in the session their solution. They then explain their methodology and compare it with the other group.

   **Benefits:**
   a) Communication and collaboration – students work each other to come up with a solution and then communicate their findings to their peers in the session. This helps student understand that being able to communicate their work and pass if forward to others is a key component of the learning process
   b) This strategy allows students to be exposed to more than one method of approaching a question, effectively catering to diverse groups of learners.
2) **Partner Mystery:** In this strategy, students work in pairs to understand the thought process of their partner. One student solves a problem, and the other tries to explain it and justify how to reach the solution. This is more effective than hearing the explanation from the person who created the solution because it forces the student to understand each step of the process and to be able to communicate it.