

Group Discussion Techniques

All learners need to process new ideas and information. There are many different ways to structure classroom discussions so that students feel interested and engaged.

Having students work in many different kinds of groups is one of the best ways to encourage and increase student participation. Below is a list of different techniques – all designed as a break from just sitting around the table or having to speak in a big group.

1. Go-Around or “Whip Around”
 - When a one or two- word answer can reveal students’ thinking and get the ball rolling; mentor asks students to respond to a standard prompt or question one at a time and “whip” around the circle.
 - Examples: how you’re feeling today; how this day is going for you; one word to describe best team you’ve ever been on
2. Think Time
 - Begin the group by giving students a few minutes to reflect or write on a topic relevant to the discussion.
 - Give them time to gather their thoughts before the discussion.
3. Turn and Talk
 - When prompted, students turn to peer and in a set amount of time, share their ideas with each other. Then can share with larger group.
4. Fist-to-Five or Thumb-Ometer
 - To show agreement or commonalities in ideas, students can quickly show their thinking by putting thumbs up, sideways or down; or by holding up fingers for 0-5 from Disagree to Agree.
5. Post-It! Writing – students do their own personal writing about the question or day’s topic before they join in group discussion.
 - Good for introverts or internal processors.
 - Can also use post-its to write on and then put post-its on the board or on poster paper for others to see.
6. Think (or Ink) Pair Share
 - Students are given a set number of minutes to think or ink (write) freely to process their own understanding or opinion about a topic.
 - Students then share their thinking or writing with a peer for another short and specific time frame (ex. 1 min. each).
 - Students then share with whole group – teacher can chart the diverse ideas and then group summarizes together.
 - Option: Double Pair Share – After pairs discuss they find another pair and share ideas as a foursome.
7. 2-4-8 Idea Generating and Clustering
 - Give out post-its. Individual members write for a few minutes in response to a question or topic. One idea per post-it.
 - Then – form pairs; share post-its by reading them aloud to each other. Stick similar ideas together
 - Ask pairs to find another pair.

- One person in group of four describes a theme of a post-it cluster.
 - The other pair reads aloud any of their similar ideas.
 - The foursome stick similar ideas together on flip chart paper.
 - One more round of eight.
 - Final - write headings for the main themes of the post-its and put on wall.
 - Everyone walks around room and looks at all the themes followed by debrief discussion about similarities etc.
8. Four Corners
- Students move to one corner of the room that represents their thinking about a question or topic.
 - Examples for corners = disagree to agree; good to bad; age it's appropriate to do something etc.
 - After students go to the corner that represents their thinking they talk with each other about why they're there. Then can share with whole group.
 - Students can change corners after they hear different opinions, etc.
9. The Continuum
- Non-threatening way to get teens thinking, to see where group members stand on the topic, and to get them moving around.
 - Indicate an imaginary line down middle of the room – one end represents “agree” and the other “disagree” and everything in between.
 - Start by making a statement related to the week's discussion topic such as “The only way to get a good grade in a class is to have a good relationship with the teacher.”
 - Mentees then place themselves anywhere along the line that indicates how they feel about the statement.
 - Follow with discussion about why they placed themselves.
10. Graffiti Wall
- Put up blank sheets of paper around the room with different questions or statements on them.
 - Invite students to stand in small groups at each sheet, write or draw their responses, and then when you say “Next!” they move to the next sheet and respond there.
11. Sticky –Note Storm
- Great for brainstorming and thinking outside the box and a good way for students to learn from each other.
 - Pose a question, set a time limit, and give students a moment to think before they write.
 - Each student writes down as many answers or ideas as they can think of and sticks it to the center of the table.
 - The idea is to generate as many ideas as possible and cover the table.
 - At end of round, students review each others' ideas.
12. Posters
- Before discussing a particular topic or issue, invite small groups to brainstorm how they might illustrate the topic on a poster.
 - Invite each group to design a poster that promotes their ideas and questions
 - Good for students who like to express themselves graphically or artistically.
13. Talk Tokens

- Good technique for encouraging everyone to participate and to regulate differences between those who talk too much and those who talk too little.
- Give everyone in the group the same number of tokens – pennies, buttons, playing cards, poker chips, etc.
- During the discussion, each time a person speaks he or she must toss a token in the middle of the table.
- Once their tokens are gone they become a “listener” while they wait for others to speak.

14. Cold call

- Use after group trust has been established.
- Name the question before identifying students to answer – give them time to think.
- Call on students using a variety of techniques – random calls, name sticks in a jar, name cards.

15. Hot Seat

- Before group, mentor places questions or statements on random seats in the room. Students pick up question or statement at their seat and answer.
- Students without a hotseat question are asked to agree or disagree with things being said.

16. Round Table

- Group members speak one at a time in an identified order without interruption – helps to demonstrate the wide range of ideas in the room
- Indicate how much time per person – 2 minutes, or 3 sentences, etc.
- Ask for volunteer to start and then go clockwise or counter clockwise.

17. Fishbowl

- Put students in a circle and take turns pulling questions related to the topic out of a hat.
- Then pass the question around the circle and each person either passes or responds.

18. Brainstorming – Idea Listing

- Clarify that all ideas are welcome - discussion, prioritization will come later.
- Figure out how to record ideas.
- Mind Map Variation – facilitator does a visual drawing of the ideas and how they're connected as people share.