

Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair-Share is a cooperative discussion strategy developed by Frank Lyman and his colleagues in Maryland. It gets its name from the three stages of student action, with emphasis on what students are to be DOING at each of those stages.

How Does It Work?

1) Think. The teacher provokes students' thinking with a question or prompt or observation. The students should take a few moments (probably not minutes) just to THINK about the question.

2) Pair. Using designated partners students PAIR up to talk about the answer each came up with. They compare their mental or written notes and identify the answers they think are best, most convincing, or most unique.

3) Share. After students talk in pairs for a few moments (again, usually not minutes), the teacher calls for pairs to SHARE their thinking with the rest of the class. She can do this by going around in round-robin fashion, calling on each pair; or she can take answers as they are called out (or as hands are raised). Often, the teacher or a designated helper will record these responses on the board or on the overhead.

Why Should I Use Think-Pair-Share?

We know that students learn, in part, by being able to talk about the content. But we do not want that to be a free-for-all. Think-Pair-Share is helpful because it structures the discussion. Students follow a prescribed process that limits off-task thinking and off-task behavior, and accountability is built in because each must report to a partner, and then partners must report to the class.

Because of the first stage, when students simply THINK, there is Wait Time: they actually have time to think about their answers. Because it is silent thinking time, you eliminate the problem of the eager and forward students who always shout out the answer, rendering unnecessary any thinking by other students. Also, the teacher has posed the question, and she has EVERYONE thinking about the answer, which is much different from asking a question and then calling on an individual student, which leads some students to gamble they won't be the one out of 30 who gets called on and therefore they don't think much about the question. Students get to try out their answers in the private sanctuary of the pair, before having to "go public" before the rest of their classmates. Kids who would never speak up in class are at least giving an answer to SOMEONE this way. Also, they often find out that their answer, which they assumed to be stupid, was actually not stupid at all...perhaps their partner thought of the same thing. Students also discover that they rethink their answer in order to express it to someone else, and they also often elaborate on their answer or think of new ideas as the partners share. These, it seems, are powerful reasons to employ Think-Pair-Share in order to structure students' thinking and their discussion.