

Think-Pair-Share and Variations

Think-Pair-Share (Frank Lyman, et al, 1981) is a collaborative discussion strategy designed to provide students with time to think and formulate their individual thoughts and ideas about a given topic or concept before forming a pair with a peer to share their thinking. It gets its name from the three stages of student action which emphasizes what the students are DOING at each of those stages.

Students individually THINK for a few moments about the prompt or question or observation the teacher provides to engage them.

Students form a PAIR with another student to talk and compare their response to the prompt.

They come to a consensus about a collective response to the prompt.

Student pairs SHARE their thinking with the rest of the class as the teacher randomly calls on them or asks for volunteers to share.

Think-Pair-Share encourages student participation from all students and promotes individual and peer accountability. Because the strategy holds students accountable for having something to share with their peers, it helps keep students on task and reduces pressure reluctant students might have about responding in front of the whole class. There are many variations of Think-Pair-Share and some examples are provided below.

Think-Pair-Share provides “think time” which can increase the quality of student responses. Because the strategy can be used at any time during the lesson, it provides students with an opportunity to think and process new ideas and information and forces them to make sense of those new ideas in light of their prior knowledge. Student misunderstandings and misconceptions about the topic or concept are often revealed and resolved during discussions with student peers. Research shows that the quality of student responses increases significantly when provided time to think. In addition, research shows that students need time to mentally “chew over” new ideas in order to store them in memory. Using Think-Pair-Share and variations of the strategy at various points throughout the lesson or unit of study promotes student understanding and retention of the information.

How to implement the strategy:

1. Have groups of four students number themselves from 1 to 4 or have students use strategies such as Clock Buddies or Seasonal Partners to form pairs.
2. Provide a prompt, topic, or problem to solve. (i.e., “How might we determine if 7th grade boys run faster on average than 7th grade girls?” Or “What are some ways we might reduce the waste in our school?”)
3. Give students a minimum of ten to fifteen seconds to THINK about the prompt and formulate their responses.

Note: Teachers need to gauge the time students need to think critically about the prompt and formulate a response. They need adequate time to think and formulate responses.

4. Assign pairs by announcing which student numbers will be partners (i.e., Students 1 and 2 will be partners and students 3 and 4 will be partners.)
5. Have students PAIR with their partner.
6. Have the student with the lowest number SHARE their response with their partner while the other student listens.
7. Have the students switch so the student with the highest number shares while their partner listens.
8. Encourage the students to discuss the topic as needed to ensure mutual understanding of the prompt.
9. Rotate around the room as students share and listen for misunderstandings or misconceptions students may have about the content to address with the whole group as well as interesting ideas or thoughts that can benefit the whole class.
10. Ask for pair volunteers to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

Variations:

- **Think-Write-Pair-Share:** Have students write their ideas in their notebooks before turning to a partner to discuss them.
- **Think-Pair-Square:** Student pairs form a square and share with another pair AFTER they have completed Think-Pair-Share.
- **Think-Draw-Share:** Students draw their own ideas before they pair up to discuss them with a partner.
- **Formulate-Share-Listen-Create:** Students individually formulate their own response to the prompt or question. They take turns sharing their responses with each other while listening carefully to their partner's response to note similarities and differences to their own response. r to the problem. Students then work with their partner to create a new response to the prompt that incorporates the best of both ideas. Students share their ideas with the whole class as asked by the teacher. .
- **Mix-Pair-Share:** Students silently mix and mingle around the room with no talking. When the teacher says "Pair," the students stop and form a pair with the person closest to them. They shake hands and stand together. The teacher provides the prompt and gives students time to think. Students take turns sharing their responses with their partner. Teachers may have the students thank their partner and repeat several times with a new prompt each time. Teachers may opt to play music while students are mixing and mingling around the classroom and have it stop when it's time to form a pair, think, and share.
- **Think-Tweet-Share:** Have students think about the prompt and develop a tweet response or tweet representation that is no more than 140 characters to share globally.
- **Think-Text-Share:** Have students think about the prompt and text their response to their partner (if cell phones are allowed in class).

- **Think-Pair-Wordle-Share:** The teacher poses a question such as “What are all the words you can think of to describe “waves” (process, action, thing, person, etc.). Students are given time to think individually and then they form a pair to share their ideas and develop one Wordle between the two of them to share with the group.
- **Think-Blog-Respond:** Students think of various ideas for blog postings and create a post. The partner reads the blog post and responds.
- **Timed-Pair-Share:** Give each student sixty seconds to share and call time so the other partner knows when it’s time to share. This can be very helpful if one person in a pair is monopolizing the sharing time.

Additional Resources:

- Gunter, M. A., Estes, T. H., & Schwab, J. H. (1999). *Instruction: A Models Approach*, 3rd edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Lyman, F. (1981). "The responsive classroom discussion." In Anderson, A. S. (Ed.), *Mainstreaming Digest*. College Park, MD: University of Maryland College of Education.
- Millis, B. J., & Cottell, P. G., Jr. (1998). *Cooperative learning for higher education faculty*, American Council on Education, Series on Higher Education. The Oryx Press: Phoenix, AZ.