

Think-Pair-Share

by Emily O. Gravett

No matter where we are in our teaching journey—just starting out or having taught for decades—it never hurts to be reminded of or reconsider simple but effective instructional strategies in your, well, teaching toolbox. So, in this spirit, I wanted to share [an easy active learning strategy](#) I routinely use in my own classes. You might have heard of it. It's called "think-pair-share." The basic gist is that you pose an open-ended question for your students, you give them time to *think* individually about their answer, you put them into a *pair* with another student close by to discuss their answers and any follow-up questions with each other, and then the pairs *share* out to the rest of class what they have discussed.

There are several reasons to do this activity. Students have a chance to learn from each other. They might feel less anxious or more willing to take risks because the stakes are so low. And they have the time and space to actually think (vs. the instructor immediately calling on the same students who are quick-processors or who think as they talk)—which is why think-pair-share is a part of [the UDL Toolkit](#). Think-pair-share gets students talking, involved, and actively considering the question at hand. One Bowling Green State University student, [for an Honors project](#), actually investigated the effects of think-pair-share, discovering that, for instance, students' participation increased and students' comfort and confidence when contributing to class discussion also increased, as a result of think-pair-share.

Personally, I want my students to be engaged and involved in the learning process; I want them to be the ones who are *doing*, much more so than me. (And, I've noticed, the more active I keep the classroom, the less likely they are—the fewer chances they literally have—to be doing other distracting things, like texting or browsing the internet.)

Think-pair-share can be used in any class at any time. It doesn't take much time to prepare, on the instructor's part, and it doesn't take long to explain to students or to implement. It can be used in both large classes and small ones. It doesn't get thwarted by older, more traditional classroom configurations (e.g., bolted down chairs/desks) the way that some other instructional techniques do. It can also easily be adapted to [online learning environments](#) (e.g., by taking advantage of Zoom breakout rooms).

There are countless [variations](#) of think-pair-share; some of the [best ideas come from our expert K-12 colleagues](#). You might have students write down their thoughts for the thinking portion. You might put them into small groups instead of pairs. You might merge or mix pairs after an initial period of sharing. You might have them share on a Google Doc or the white board instead of verbally in front of the whole class. You might have them draw or tweet (or X or whatever the heck it's called now) instead of talking in pairs. The list goes on.

Lately, I've actually been skipping the "share" step when I do think-pair-share in class. I've observed that the most valuable part of the activity is when students have the chance to think on their own and then learn from a small group of others. That's already happened, to some extent, in the pairs by the time we get to the "share" portion. I usually don't have time for every pair to do a debrief of what they discussed anyway. Sometimes I call on just a few pairs, sometimes I don't even do that. I tell them, what you learned initially from each other (peer learning!) is enough. [I recently also discovered that others have called into question the assumptions undergirding the "share" portion of think-pair-share](#) and its supposed benefits.

We don't have to completely overhaul our teaching in order to improve it. It would be nice if I could transform my classes every year. (Maybe.) But I don't always have the time or the energy. And sometimes just little tweaks to our approaches—a new poll here, an updated rubric there—can have a real impact on our students' experiences and our own. What I always appreciate are little tips or tricks I can easily and immediately use. Think-pair-share is something you can do this week. I know I have.

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