

## *Using Think-Pair-Share Activities*

### **A) Think-pair-share: the rationale**

The think-pair-share activity is a short flexible activity to engage students, increase learning, and break up traditional lectures in which students have a primarily passive role.

- When students engage with the material (instead of just hearing it), they retain it longer and understand it more deeply.
- Students with different learning styles are able to participate. (Reflective learners have time to think, shy people have a small group to interact with, social learners get to talk about material, visual learners get to use notes, etc.) It contributes to a safe learning environment.
- The classroom energy level can skyrocket, with energy coming from many people instead of mostly from the instructor.
- Instructor and class get a better idea of gaps in understanding and where attention should be placed. Instead of blanket coverage, these activities help you and the class to focus time and effort more precisely where it is most important.
- Students have more opportunity to think critically, as they articulate and explain their ideas.

### **B) Think-pair-share: the basic recipe**

1. You, as instructor, write 1-2 questions for students to consider. Decide on your purpose and craft appropriate questions. For example, a question could:
  - Invite students to think critically about specific concepts
  - Invite students to connect ideas from class/reading to personal experience or observations in the real world
  - Ask students to summarize the main points of X
2. **THINK.** Individually, students consider the question(s) and make notes about their response. (This is relatively short, 1-2 minutes, maybe even 30 seconds.)
3. **PAIR** (2 or more). In pairs or small groups, students discuss the question(s). This discussion can be long or short, depending on time, energy, and interest. (For a longer activity, each group should assign someone as their summarizer.)

(Note: While the pairs/groups discuss, the instructor circulates, spending a little time with some or all groups and getting a general flavor of the discussions. Also, if a group seems confused, stuck, or off-topic, you can ask a relevant question to get them back on track.)

Likewise, you can help a group struggling with discussion dynamics, for example, by directing the floor away from a dominant student and inviting participation from others, or clarifying the task.)

4. **SHARE.** Invite responses. Now everyone has something to say, and students get to hear a variety of ideas. After a couple of groups have shared, you can simply ask “Who has something different?” — there is no need to hear from each group. This is also a good time to invite someone in the back row to contribute, participating in a low stakes activity.

If appropriate, you can record key points or highlights on the board, grouping related ideas. You can also add information (if something important has been left out) or address misunderstandings or questions. You can push the critical thinking and analysis here, as well as the content.

5. By the end of this activity, the students have engaged with the key content in a memorable way. The instructor has gotten a glimpse of the students’ understanding and interests and challenges.

### **C) Think-pair-share: many possibilities**

This approach can be used to:

- Flesh out key ideas and information
- Integrate concepts: old information with new information
- Apply concepts from class to problems / case studies
- Explore and solve a complex problem with multiple steps (consider doing a series of think-pair-shares, to break the problem into steps)
- Assess how well students understood a reading or lecture
- Uncover misconceptions
- Preview new ideas
- Extend concepts across courses and disciplines, as well as into the real world using students’ own observations and experiences

### **D) Think-pair-share: troubleshooting**

Generally think-pair-share is a smooth activity that generates energy and engagement. It can take as little as 2-3 minutes, or longer if you prefer.

For meatier questions and longer activities, the instructor can monitor the groups, to see if they are staying on topic and including all members. Over the course of the semester, ask different students to be summarizers and vary the groups; sometimes students can number off to insure that they work with different people. If necessary, you and the class can brainstorm the qualities of successful groups.

Through this process, your students are refining their communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills. Research has also shown that this kind of activity helps students engage with diverse perspectives, lowers drop withdrawal and failure rates, and increases retention in the discipline.