

ENGAGE THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Full, fair participation by all students in whole-group academic and social activities is crucial to overall engagement. A community works best when all are involved. When even one person drifts off on his own, the community is weakened. To encourage engagement and participation of everyone in a class discussion, use a variety of ways to invite students to answer questions and share their thoughts. Several are described below. Always be clear about which format you want them to use at any particular time: set the expectation, and stick with it.

Formats for participation

Sometimes you want to conduct discussions that feel safe for everyone; at other times, it encourages growth to introduce a little risk. Start the year using safer, low-risk techniques, building a trusting environment before moving to formats that pull students out of their comfort zones. Build success on success, one discussion at a time. The following techniques are listed in order, starting with the safer techniques and ending with the more risky.

Visual surveys of the class: Each student can answer a question silently, using fingers indicating degree of agreement on a scale of one to five, or thumbs (thumb up = “I agree,” thumb sideways = “I’m on the fence,” thumb down = “I disagree”).

Rate the degree to which the author’s argument persuades you. Flash a “fist of five” to indicate your opinion, five being ‘extremely persuasive,’ one being ‘not persuasive at all.’

Sticky-note response: Students write an answer to your question on a sticky note and display it.

Write your answer on a sticky note. We’ll analyze them together in 2 minutes.

Partner share: Ask partners to briefly share their ideas about a topic.

What do you think? Share your thoughts with your partner; you’ll each have 30 seconds.

Call and response: Students say an answer in unison. This works best for reviewing factual material students already know. At the point where an answer is required, the teacher pauses, creating space for the students to say the answer. The pause may be accompanied by a gesture to invite response.

Teacher: *How did we come up with this answer? Let’s go through it step by step. Thirteen goes into 130 how many times_____?*

All: *Ten*

Teacher: *Right. 15 times 3 is _____?*

All: *45*



Kitchen Table Talk: Students act as members of a big family, contributing to the discussion at random and without raising hands, but without raising voices.

Let's brainstorm a list of the causes of the fall of the Ottoman Empire. No need to raise your hand to respond; just say an answer. Give me time after each response to jot it down.

Raising hands (volunteering): Students raise their hands to signal that they would like to give an answer. They remain silent, hands raised, until called upon.

For the next ten minutes, we're going to review problems 1-6. Raise your hand and wait for me to call on you before answering.

Volunteering plus: After hands go up, push a little: say how many additional hands you need to see before you will call on anybody.

I see 3 hands; I need 2 more. Who's willing?

Partner share followed by random calling: Partners share their ideas; when the partner share is complete, randomly call on individuals. You could call for volunteers to share out, rather than calling on individuals, to lower the risk.

Round-robin input: Each student gets a chance to respond to a question. You may allow students to pass temporarily, but return to them for a response.

Peer-to-peer calling: Students call on each other. After the leader calls on the first student to get her input, that student calls on the next student, and so on.

Variation: Students may pass a symbolic object—a decorated “talking stick” is one possibility—from one speaker to the next. The only student allowed to speak is the one holding the symbol.

Random calling: Leader calls on students by randomly pointing to names on a class list, pulling papers or sticks with student names on them out of a container, or some other randomization method.

As we look at this projection of the night sky together, I'll be calling on you at random to ask you what you notice. Pay attention and have a response ready—you won't know who I'm going to call next.

As a variation, each time a student is called, offer him the choice to:

- Answer the question: participant gives an answer
- Ask a friend (if s/he isn't sure of the answer): the student gives what s/he knows, and then asks a friend to help out with the rest of the answer
- Pass (if s/he does not know and doesn't want to guess)