

## **Pair and Group Work**

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### **What is Pair and Group Work?**

Used in conjunction with individual and whole-class work, pair and group work is the act of dividing students so that they work cooperatively with only a small number of their classmates on a specific task assigned by their teacher.

Pair and group work first came into usage in the 1970s when teachers first noticed that more than 80% of all classroom talk was teacher talk. Pair and Group work was designed to do many things which are difficult to accomplish in other settings. For example, pair and group work can:

1. Allow for more student talk time
2. Encourage shy students to speak
3. Let students speak without the teacher listening
4. Encourage students to help and support each other
5. Provide variety to classroom activities
6. Give students more control over the lesson

Some important concepts related to using pair and group work are:

1. Students interact with each other as a means of practicing real-world English for a purpose that is interesting and challenging to them.
2. Students learn to depend on each other in the completion of specific tasks related to the objective of the group. For example, students can have different roles such as recorder, time-keeper or speaker and they must work together for a common purpose.
3. Students get a sense of safe competition when they work in small groups and share their conclusions with other members of the class. This can encourage students to work together more effectively in the completion of their task.
4. If students are to complete their task successfully, each member feels a sense of accountability in the task's completion and is, thus, motivated to contribute.

### **Cooperative Skills Students Use in Pair and Group Work**

For beginners or low-level students, much of the skills required for pair and group work will be difficult, but it is important to allow them to practice. It is also helpful for the teacher to provide them with examples of how one might complete these actions so that they are better prepared to use them in English while in their groups.

1. explain directions
2. offer suggestions
3. help each other without interfering
4. encourage each other
5. paraphrase
6. request a justification
7. extend each other's utterances
8. express emotion
9. resolve conflict
10. criticize each other without giving offense

In addition, beginning students can be asked to only perform certain assignment tasks in English, while completing the more difficult tasks in their native language. As they become more and more used to this kind of activity, the teacher can ask them to use more English when they are in groups.

### **Steps to Designing Effective Pair and Group Work Activities**

First of all, students who are not used to this type of activity may not respond positively to it at first, but the teacher should not take this as a bad sign. Over time, students will get used to and, eventually, thrive in such classroom situations.

It is a good idea to start as the whole group when the teacher gives directions. The directions should be clear and the teacher should be certain that all students understand. It may be helpful to write them on the board or include them in a handout. The instructions should give a clear objective and a time limit.

The activity should be one that is both challenging and interesting to the students, but not one that is beyond their skill level. It should also encourage students to work together to solve a problem or come to a group conclusion that is not necessarily known by the teacher. Most importantly, the activity must be one that allows for students to express their own opinions and ideas. It is only then that students will practice English in a way that most approximates real-world usage: creatively.

Then, divide students into groups or pairs. Groups are better for longer, more complex tasks and pairs are good for simple tasks. Group work is also good if you want students to share their results with their classmates at the end of the activity.

Groups can be created any way the teacher sees fit. Some teachers like to divide based on skill or activity level. Others prefer to divide randomly. It is sometimes good for student groups to be different in every activity so that there will be a greater variety of ideas.

Next, the teacher can assign different students specific tasks. One can be the timekeeper, while another can be the discussion leader. Yet another can be the recorder and write down all the group's ideas. This is a good opportunity for students to take control over their own learning by choosing their own roles when they are in groups.

During the activity, the teacher should walk around the room and monitor the groups' progress. She can answer questions and make sure that groups are on task. At this point, however, the students should be doing almost all of the talking.

When time is up, the teacher can then move the activity back to the whole group and ask each small group to share their ideas and conclusions. It is also helpful to encourage other students to share their opinions of what their classmates have concluded.

It is important to note that pair and group work is not useful for every type of language lesson, but it can be adapted for most. The skillful teacher knows how to build and manage such activities and create them so that they exploit the needs of her unique group of students.