

# Classroom Discussion Methods

Name:	Good for:	How to:
Pair Share	Getting people to participate in a safe, non-threatening way. Done early in the session, it gives you a feel for the participants, and what they are thinking. Great for large groups where breaking into groups would be impractical or where asking individuals might make them uncomfortable.	Ask a question, then have people discuss it with their nearest neighbor. Start with fairly easy question, then move to more challenging or sensitive ones. Can be done in any size group.
Show of Hands	Getting a quick “read” of your group. Generally closed-ended, so they don’t tend to lead to long discussions. Getting people to participate in a nonthreatening way.	Ask the question and raise your own hand to encourage them to do the same. You may wish to comment on what you observe.
Table Discussion	Making a large group more intimate, allowing a safer space for discussion than a large group. Let’s you see how much energy people have around the subject matter.	Pose a question, an activity, or assignment on a flipchart so everyone sees it. Assign an estimated time for the discussion. Take a few minutes to hear highlights back from each group. (You may want them to write their highlights or findings on flipcharts and stand up to report out.) If you circulate around the room during the activity, come close enough to hear snatches of the conversation, but not enough that you disrupt the discussions. Be ready to answer questions if the group is stuck, but don’t take over their discussions.
Walk and Talk	A change of pace during a long sitting day, or when the weather is nice and people really want to be outside.	Provide a question for discussion, and have people pair off, preferably with someone they don’t already know. Give them a stated time to return, ready to share highlights of their conversation.
Read and Reflect	Quiet groups, introverted individuals, or to provide a more reflective tone. Great for complex topics or action planning.	Assign the reading material and questions they should reflect on at the end. Provide a space for them to write their reflections. Don’t make the reading assignment too long.

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Circle Discussion	Discussion of more sensitive matters, a change of pace, or a guided discussion or open space discussions.	Provide content or questions to guide the discussion. Set time limits or guidelines/ground rules for the discussion. State the purpose of the discussion. Try to avoid over facilitating the discussion. You may use a ball or another object as a talking stick.
Card Discussion	When you want to replace a lecture with a discussion, but participants may or may not have enough background or experience to come up with content. Could be used as a review.	Print portions of content on cardstock and distribute randomly. Have the participants choose the sequence, or speak when they are ready. Don't allow them to simply go around in a circle. You can do this in a medium to large groups. In large groups (over 20 participants) consider having several circles. They can be seated or remain standing.
Gallery Crawl	Large amount of material to be covered. Everyone should have some ideas on the content. People may need a break from sitting.	Set up flip charts with the topics written at the top. You can do this ahead of time or on-the-spot. Give everyone markers and have them circulate around the room, writing their ideas on each flip chart, and maybe having conversations about the content. You may wish to play some background music or set a timer. At the end, when flip charts seem "done" have a short (or longer) discussion of each topic.