

Interactive Learning Structures

Four Corners

1. Pose a question (academic or social) that has four possible responses. For example: "If you could choose one favorite weekend activity, what would it be?"
2. Designate one corner of the room for each response, for example:
 - Corner one—Listening to music
 - Corner two—Reading
 - Corner three—Spending time outdoors
 - Corner four—Sleeping
3. Give students a minute to reflect on their choice. When time is up, they move to the corresponding corner.
4. In their corners, students discuss in small groups (or pairs) why they made their choice.
5. Allow about 1–2 minutes for the discussion. Provide a 10-second warning before time is up.
6. Repeat, with a new question and responses, as time allows.

Snowball

1. Give each student a strip of blank white paper.
2. Students write a statement on the paper in response to a question or topic you pose (they do not put their names on the paper).
3. Students gather in a circle, crumple up their piece of paper, and toss their "snowball" into the center of the circle.
4. Everyone picks up a snowball and, going around the circle, takes turns reading it aloud.

World Café

(An adaptation of the World Café™, a structured conversational process, found at www.theworldcafe.com)

1. Have students form tables of four or five.
2. Assign each table a facilitator and give each table a different discussion topic.

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3. Provide a question to focus the table discussions. Allow 2–3 minutes for discussion
4. When time is up, give a signal to wrap up conversations. Invite two or three students per table to change tables. Pose a new focus question or use the same one for new table groups to discuss.
5. Do several more rounds of table changes as time allows. then bring everyone back together and invite several volunteers to share out on idea from their table discussions.

Table Talk

1. Students sit in table groups of four or five.
2. Assign a topic or reading, and give a few minutes for students to individually jot down their own ideas and questions about the topic or to read the material. (For assigned readings, ask students to place a checkmark next to any ideas they agree with and a star next to ideas they want to learn more about.)
3. Give a 1-minute warning to let students know to wrap up their note-taking or reading.
4. Give the table groups time to discuss the topic or reading in an around-the-table format.
5. After this table sharing, pose a question for reflection on the topic or reading. Allow a few minutes for table groups to discuss.

Amazing Analogies

1. Have students form small groups, and assign a recorder and presenter for each group.
2. Identify a content-related topic and ask how it's related to something else, such as a common object or activity. For example: "How is Atticus Finch like a calendar?"
3. Set the timer. Groups take 1–2 minutes to come up with reasons and evidence to support the analogy. Give a sentence stem for them to follow: "Atticus Finch is like a calendar because _____."
4. When time is up, each group's presenter shares one of the group's ideas with the whole class.
5. Repeat for 3 to 5 more content topics and common objects or activities.

Graffiti

1. Post charts around the room with different questions or ideas that relate to one content area being studied.
2. Invite students to write their ideas on the charts. They can start at any chart, go in any order, and write in any style anywhere on the chart.
3. Working in small groups, students find common themes among the ideas on each chart.
4. Have each group share their findings with the whole class.

Maitre d'

1. Call out a table grouping (e.g., "Table for two"). Students quickly form a standing group of that number.
2. Ask a question or give a topic for discussion. Give students 1–2 minutes to share their responses.
3. Give a 15-second warning, and then signal to end the round. Call out another table grouping ("Table for four"). Repeat the same question or topic with the new groups, or pose a different one.
4. Repeat as time allows, varying the table numbers with each round.
5. To extend the learning, bring students together as a whole group and ask a few volunteers to share highlights from one of their conversations.

Mix and Mingle to Music

This activity can be also done without music by ringing a chime when it's time for students to stop moving about the room and find a partner.

1. With students standing in a circle, pose a question or topic for discussion.
2. Play music for about 30 seconds while students walk around the room. When you stop the music, students pair up with someone nearby.
3. Partners take turns discussing the question or topic that you posed or that is on their index card. Repeat for several rounds, as time allows.
4. Ask for volunteers to share out one thing that surprised them or one thing they learned during their sharing.

Museum Walk

1. Students display recently completed small group work or brainstormed lists on the walls around the room.
2. Direct students to walk around and look at all the items displayed.
3. Give a focus for the Walk; for example, you might ask students to pay attention to which characteristics are similar and different among the items displayed, or to note characteristics that surprise them.
4. Encourage students to take notes on what they notice.
5. Optional: After a few minutes, gather the group together and ask a few people to share their observations.

One-Sentence Summary

This structure can also be done as a whole group.

1. Students form small groups. Assign each group a recorder and a presenter.
2. Explain the topic for discussion (for example, a subject or content from a unit that is being studied). Each group takes 2–3 minutes to come up with one sentence that summarizes their new knowledge about that subject or content. Recorders write down the sentence.
3. Signal when time is up and call on presenters to share their group's summary sentence.
4. After each group shares, guide the whole group to collaborate on choosing one word—that captures the essence of all the summary sentences.

RULES AND ROUTINES PLANNER

Upcoming unit or activity	Routines to teach or reteach	Rules to review

INTERACTIVE LEARNING STRUCTURES PLANNER

When students are . . . [learning a skill, practicing, or reflecting]	I'll try this structure	How it went	What I'll change next time

Addressing Common Challenges With Interactive Learning Structures

Challenge	Possible Causes	What Might Help
<p>Students have trouble settling down after doing a learning structure.</p>	<p>Students may have brought high energy with them from events earlier in their day; they might not know how you want them to transition from the structure to the next part of the lesson.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students of behavior expectations. • Try a calming energizer to help them settle themselves. • Do an abbreviated Interactive Modeling to reteach the structure. Be sure to include your expectations for the transition. For example: “When I ring the chime, head back to your seats, close your eyes, and take three deep breaths.”
<p>Students get silly while doing a learning structure.</p>	<p>They may not understand the purpose of the structure or how to do it; the structure may not be the best fit for them developmentally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop the action and briefly tell students why: “We have to stop because you’re getting silly. You can try again another time.” • Teach skills essential to the structure—for example, to succeed with <i>Maître d’</i>, students need to know how to move around the room safely while others are also moving. • Reteach the structure. Invite students’ questions about parts they don’t understand. • Consider students’ developmental readiness. For example, seven-year-olds tend to work better with a partner than a small group, so you might want to limit group structures early in the year or offer extra support when using them.
<p>You have trouble coming up with different structures to use for all your classes.</p>	<p>You haven’t had enough time to explore other structures, or you might be overly concerned about changing structures frequently or differentiating by grade levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pace yourself. It’s OK to add new structures slowly, when you have the time to teach them carefully. • Remind yourself that although some variety helps keep things fresh, students also enjoy feeling competent with structures they know well. • Remember that the same structure will feel different with different content. • Keep in mind that these structures work across all grade levels. Just be sure to teach them first and offer a bit more support to younger students.