

Flexible Grouping in MS and HS Classrooms

Handouts



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**These strategies were pulled together from
multiple resources:**

*STRIVE's Data System: A how-to on
planning, teaching, and assessing reading
groups*

Dr. Anita Archer

*Designing in 5- Essential Phases to Create
Engaging Assessment Practice*

*The Metacognitive Student (Richard K.
Cohen, Deanne Kildare Opatosky, James
Savage, Susan Olsen Stevens, Edward P.
Darrah)*

*Universal Design for Learning in Action
(Whitney H. Rapp)*

*Kagan Cooperative Learning (Dr. Spencer
Kagan and Miguel Kagan)*

*The Flexibly Grouped Classroom (Kristina J.
Doubet)*

Think-Pair-Share

What: A planned turn and talk discussion. Used best with open ended questions and problems. Students are provided an opportunity to “think” about the question before pairing up “pair” with their partner and discussing the question. Then the partners “share” out their answers with a larger group or another set of partners.

How: Explicitly teach what it looks like for each part of think-pair-share, including actively listening to your partner. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions. At the end, teachers call on one or two students to share out the answer or even share a new question that came up.

Think-Pair-Share Partner Sets

Partners share their answers with another set of partners and a new question is provided by the teacher or the partners come up with a new question. Goal here is to go deeper with question moving from Depth of knowledge (DOK) level 1 (recall) and level 2 (skills and concepts) to DOK level 3 (strategic thinking) or 4 (extended thinking).

Form a Line

What: A teacher or student led grouping strategy that utilizes classroom social skills. Grouping is based on student responses to either objective (birthday month, sport they play, color of shirt) or subjective (likes and dislikes of students, e.g., favorite food, candy, movie) criterion.

How: Grouping for the upcoming activity can be determined by who they are standing next to OR two lines can be formed so groups are determined by who they are standing across from. Increase the challenge by putting shorter time limits on line forming or asking students to create the line without talking. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Reshuffle the Line or Combine:

Midway through instructional time partners or groups can be redetermined with a new question or new position in the original line. OR groups can be combined to share content or solutions and go deeper with question moving from Depth of knowledge (DOK) level 1 (recall) and level 2 (skills and concepts) to DOK level 3 (strategic thinking) or 4 (extended thinking).

Shuffle the Cards

What: A versatile grouping strategy that can be random or structured and can be used to provide several different grouping possibilities during a single instructional time period.

How: Teacher selects a number of playing cards from the deck that is equal to the number of students in the class. The cards should have an even distribution of numbers and suits (e.g., face cards only in each of the four suits or cards numbered 6-10 in opposite color suits (hearts and clubs)). For more randomized grouping, students can be handed cards as they enter the classroom. For more structured grouping, cards can be placed on student's desks prior to instructional time. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Reshuffle the Cards or Combine:

Midway through instructional time partners or groups can be redetermined with a new question or new grouping criterion (e.g., all red cards, all jacks, any card higher than 6). This gives the teacher options to change the size of the groups making them larger or smaller and offers a clear and efficient way to break up long instructional blocks and re-engage students. As with similar strategies, groups can be easily combined to share content or solutions and go deeper with question moving from Depth of knowledge (DOK) level 1 (recall) and level 2 (skills and concepts) to DOK level 3 (strategic thinking) or 4 (extended thinking).

Grid Pairs:

What: A student directed long term grouping/pairing strategy that is used over the course of a quarter/semester/term.

How: The teacher provides a preprinted classroom grid that has each student's name in an individual square with blank space below each name. When the teacher announces a grid pair activity, student's find a partner or group and put the date below the name of the student(s) they work with. Students should fill the grid by working with a different student in the class during grid pair activities before they can work with a previously selected partners. Multiple lines can be provided for date recording depending on how often the class grid pairs/groups for activities. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Grid Groups:

Groups of varying size can be formed using the grid worksheet by working in quads or combining multiple grid pairs. **TIP:** Grid worksheets work best when glued or stapled to notebooks or workbooks on the inside cover so that all students can locate them easily and all students have them in the same place.

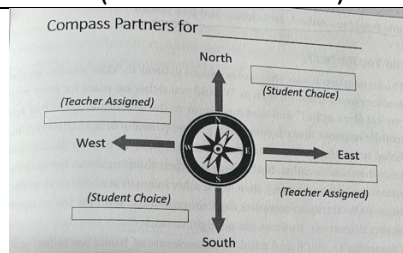
Compass Partners

What: A grouping strategy that combines teacher choice and student choice. Teacher choice partners can be established based on content criteria or social dynamic.

How: Each student is provided a sheet with four directions with a space left blank next to each for classmates' names. The teacher chooses two partners (North and South) and the students choose two partners (East and West). Student choice tends to be based on classroom friendships, so be mindful during the process to ensure that no one is excluded (teacher should assign students who are likely to be left out).

Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

From the Flexibly Grouped Classroom (Kristina J. Doubet)



Would You Rather?

What: This grouping strategy creates two groups using a Would You Rather question that the teacher can then utilize to break into pairs, trios, or quads to discuss and collaborate.

How: Students are given time to discuss their Would You Rather response during initial breakout to encourage participation and teacher can use response to this low-stakes discussion to create like-minded smaller groupings. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Would You Rather Examples:

Would you rather be able to fly or read minds?

Would you rather be an amazing artists or a brilliant mathematician?

Would you rather go barefoot or wear shoes?

Would you rather be ten feet tall or ten inches tall?

Table Topics

What: A grouping strategy where teachers create a variety of classroom groupings based on student responses to beginning of the year student surveys.

How: The teacher will post group type/name, assigned students, and area of the classroom to meet. Students can discuss why they may have been included in the group as an ice breaker prior to beginning work on the instructional focus. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Table Topics Tip:

It's a good idea to use this strategy at the beginning of the school year because it;

1. is an encouragement to genuinely scrutinize students' survey responses instead of filing them away
2. builds trust by showing students their teacher is paying attention to their expressed interests, and
3. helps students get to know one another and discover unexpected connections.

From: The Progression of Flexible Grouping

Four Corners

What: A grouping strategy that utilizes student choice and area of interest to determine collaborative groups.

How: The four corners of the classroom are assigned a response choice to an interest-based or student choice question (What is your favorite ice cream flavor? Chocolate, Vanilla, Bubblegum, Mint Chip – OR – How do you spend your free time? Playing sports, Watching shows/movies, Playing video games, Reading)

Students can discuss why they chose the corner as an ice breaker prior to beginning work on the instructional focus. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Four Corners DOK:

The corner assignments/choices can be made in order to form basic groupings or can then be associated with content that is linked to the student's area of interest. For instance, math story problems that relate to sports or articles to read about video games with students providing short constructed responses or persuasive arguments related to the article.

Jigsaw

What: A cooperative learning grouping strategy where each member of a small group becomes an expert on one aspect of the content so that they can share their expertise with other small group members.

How: In the small groups, each member selects one “piece” of the task and then regroup with members of the other small groups (expert groups) who also have that same “piece” of their small group task. Provide structure (e.g., note organizers/graphic organizers) to monitor accuracy and information sharing of “experts.” Plan to embed a closure step to check for student understanding. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Why:

Jigsaw strategies can motivate students and increase their sense of accountability to the task or content. Jigsaw can help students synthesize large amounts of material. The small group and graphic organizer sharing techniques can be used for the following Raft and TriMind strategies.

RAFT

What: A writing choice strategy where students assume a (R)ole, consider their (A)udience, work within a (F)ormat, and examine a (T)opic from their chosen perspective.

How: Teacher can provide many different avenues for selecting each option. Some aspects can be kept constant while other variables are left to student choice. Selection examples are by dice role, pick a row, mix and match grid, or custom combination. Work can be completed independently or in groups formed by similar task option (jigsaw) with sharing out groups formed with classmates who chose different tasks.

Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

Role	Audience	Format (choose one)	Topic (choose one)

TriMind (Doubet & Hockett, 2015, 2017)

What: An instructional and grouping strategy that uses three thinking preferences – analytical, practical, and creative abilities as the framework for instructional tasks and assessment of content.

How: Teacher creates three tasks that appeal to each of the thinking preferences and that are aligned with the same learning goals. Tasks are presented numerically (task 1, 2, 3) to avoid choice by label and as options to students. Work can be completed independently or in groups formed by similar task options (jigsaw) with sharing out groups formed with classmates who chose different tasks. Explicitly teach what it looks like to achieve constructive group work, including actively listening to your partner. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

More about the thinking preferences

Analytical – Ability to analyze, compare/contrast, examine cause and effect, and think in logical-sequential ways. These abilities are measured on most standardized tests.

Practical – Ability to apply knowledge and skills to real world tasks. Practical thinkers engage in on the spot problem solving, execute tasks efficiently, and organize and motivate people/teams.

Creative – Ability to imagine possibilities and think outside the box. Creative thinkers innovate, dream, and propose novel solutions.

Topic:

Introduction:

Task 1 (analytical)

Task 2 (practical)

Task 3 (creative)

Closure Activity:

Team Huddles

What: A differentiated teacher led grouping strategy that targets student learning needs (supplemental or enrichment).

How: Team Huddles that are formed for a variety of reasons normalize the strategy and dissipate the stigma of the teacher led grouping addressing low performance or behavioral problems. Implemented correctly and often, Team Huddles become part of everyday class activities and can be used while other students are working independently, in small groups, or in workstations.

From: The Progression of Flexible Grouping

Examples of when to Huddle Up:

- to catch up an absent student
- answer an exit-card question raised by only a handful of students
- clarify a misconception revealed in an assignment or assessment
- provide “next-level” questions for students ready to explore a topic in more depth
- provide resources to students with a specialized curiosity around a topic
- provide a more intimate setting for students learning English to practice their language skills

Self-Assessment Groups

What: A Team Huddle differentiated grouping strategy that is based on student self-assessment. Student self-assessment follows a lesson and is based on their perception of understanding new content and their readiness to complete an assigned follow-up task.

How: Groups are designated (A) need to hear the information again or in a new way, (B) basically understand but have a few clarifying questions, and (C) ready to complete the task without additional support or direction. (C) group students are moved to the back or quiet section of the classroom to begin working. (A) & (B) students come together with the teacher. (B) students are asked to share their clarifying questions and students are then asked to re-assess their grouping. Students now ready to complete the task move to the (C) section of the classroom and begin to work independently. Remaining (A) students stay in the Team Huddle for re-teaching of the lesson with opportunity for students to self re-assess and move to independent work. Teacher should have a “next-step” task ready for students who complete the follow-up task before the class is ready to come back to whole group for sharing and closure of the content/task.

Like-Pattern Groups

What: A grouping strategy that is based on formative assessment by the teacher where students are placed in differentiated groups based on content mastery and feedback/practice/teaching needed to progress to the next task or assignment.

How: For this strategy, the entire class works in small groups on tasks that have been tailored to their most recent assessment revealed needs and the teacher circulates providing targeted assistance where needed. Students receive only their assigned task directions (not all sets).

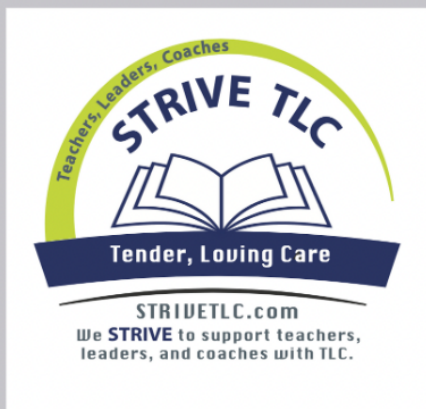
Pre-Assessment – Students are asked to read an article and create a 3 paragraph length detailed summary		
Pattern 1 Nailed it! Clear opening, provided at least 3 details, clear closing. Summary is comprehensive and clearly focuses on most important content.	Pattern 2 Almost there! Writing summarizes content but is not well organized. Some detail is provided, however some important details are missing.	Pattern 3 Try again! Summary is incomplete with little or no detail provided. Student struggled to provide important information in the summary. Writing lacks organization.
Task for Pattern 1 Take each detail from your summary and create discussion questions for why the detail is important to understanding the content/focus of the article. Pose the questions and discuss with your partners and compare what details you each found important.	Task for Pattern 2 Trade papers with your partners and re-arrange sentences and add details that you feel are left out but important to include in the summary. Pass the papers back to the original author to re-write.	Task for Pattern 3 Use the provided graphic organizer to give structure to your summary. Re-write your information using the graphic organizer and add details. When completed, pass your paper to a partner to read and make suggestions. Pass the papers back to the original author to re-write.

Learning Stations

What: This is a rotational grouping strategy that combines Team Huddles and Like-Pattern grouping. This structure allows for differentiated instruction at the Team Huddle station.

How: Each group visits every station within the instructional time period. Class can be divided in thirds or fourths depending on number of students. Learning stations are (1) Team Huddle, (2) Independent work/task using technology, (3) Partner work on collaborative tasks, and (4) Small group brainstorming or review tasks. Provide content for discussion, collaboration, or perspective from the groups. Monitoring during this time allows the teacher opportunities to provide feedback to students on both content and process and to encourage ongoing discussion when students come up with additional questions.

The learning stations technique provides a flexible structure for managing simultaneous instruction, learning activities, or tasks. Stations can be used to introduce topics or concepts, provide opportunities for practice, or explore new ideas and skills (Doubet & Hockett, 2017)



We STRIVE to support teachers, leaders, and coaches through evidence-based practices and positive supporting relationships. We customize our support based on school needs to build capacity for improved learner outcomes.

We STRIVE to provide TLC (tender, loving, care) to teachers, leaders, and coaches through our nonprofit by giving back at least 10% of all STRIVE proceeds through consulting, scholarships, resources, and give-a-ways.

STRIVE services include professional development (virtual and in person), onsite consulting, customized development work, and proposal and grant writing. STRIVE's evidence-based models lay the foundation for supporting teachers, leaders, and coaches in their journey for improving learner outcomes. We take pride in customizing each module to meet the needs of each client.

STRIVE's Models:

- STRIVE's PreK Literacy
- STRIVE's Elementary Literacy
- STRIVE's Adolescent Literacy
- STRIVE's Data System: a how to on planning, teaching, and assessing reading groups
- STRIVE's Teams: a how-to on building effective teams with effective instructional leadership
- STRIVE's Coaching: a how-to on becoming an effective instructional coach

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