

Participation Techniques

What is it?

A tool that encourages active and productive participation in classroom conversations

What are the benefits of using this tool?

In many classrooms, the teacher's voice is heard far more often than that of the students. This tool promotes a higher level of student talk by teaching students simple techniques for engaging in classroom conversations. Collectively, these techniques help students exhibit the productive conversation behaviors that the Common Core State Standards call for—behaviors like responding to and developing what others have said, asking questions, and evaluating ideas (see Speaking & Listening Standards 1 and 3).

What are the basic steps?

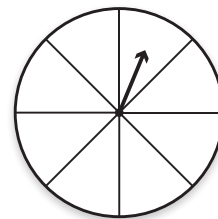
1. Share the goal of this tool (to encourage more student talk during classroom conversations) and its value (students who actively participate learn more than those who don't).
2. Prepare a list of simple but specific things that students can do to participate productively in classroom conversations. Here are some possibilities:
 - Ask a relevant question (questions can be directed toward the teacher or a classmate).
 - Agree or disagree with someone/something and explain why.
 - Make a comparison or draw a connection (to everyday life, to another topic, to a text, etc.).
 - Expand on an idea or apply it to another context.
 - String together/summarize/synthesize what's been said.
 - Take and/or support a position.
 - Offer relevant facts, details, or examples.
 - Share and discuss alternatives (solutions, viewpoints, applications, etc.).
 - Analyze or evaluate something (decision, solution, aspect of a text, use of logic/evidence, etc.).
3. Post the list of participation techniques in an easily visible location so students can refer to it throughout the year. Model the techniques for students so they're clear about how to use them.
4. Clarify that the techniques should be used during small-group, student-student conversations as well as during whole-class, teacher-led discussions.
5. Prompt students to use the techniques on a regular basis. ("We haven't heard from you today, Billy. Can you use one of our participation techniques to respond to what Jae just said?")

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To promote active participation and engagement during classroom conversations
- ✓ To develop critical speaking and listening skills

Variation 1: Wheel of Participation

For a fun twist, create a spinner wheel like the one shown here (include some or all of the participation techniques on the wheel). When you call on a student during a classroom lesson or discussion, spin the spinner, and have that student respond using whichever technique the spinner lands on. If the technique doesn't fit the context of the conversation you're having, allow the student to spin again.



Variation 2: Playing Your Participation Cards

To encourage students to participate in different ways, create decks of “participation cards” (sets of index cards with one participation technique listed on each card). Give one deck to each student and encourage students to “play all their cards” over the course of a week. (“Once you use a particular technique, you can take that card out of your deck. The goal is to use up your entire deck by the end of the week.”) If you want, you can invite students to personalize and spiff up their decks by drawing icons for the individual techniques on the backs of their cards.

Teacher Talk

- Primary-grade teachers (or any teachers for that matter) may want to use icons rather than words when creating their lists of participation techniques. Try a question mark for “ask a relevant question,” a thumbs up/thumbs down symbol for “agree or disagree with something/someone,” etc.
- If you're having trouble getting students to participate, try distributing the list of Speak-Up Stems on p. 107. This list encourages participation by highlighting specific language that students can use to get involved in classroom conversations.
- The ultimate goal is for students to use the participation techniques independently, without you reminding them. Help students develop this habit, both by prompting them to use the techniques on a regular basis (Step 5), and by noting when the techniques are used (“Luke just used one of the techniques on our list to keep the conversation going. Who can tell me which one he used?”).