

## DISCUSSION ROUTINES

An important part of the learning process is having lots of opportunities to talk with others. Provided here are some activity structures - or routines - that offer opportunities for students to discuss while in the field. These routines can be used to discuss virtually any topic.

### Turn and Talk

**Procedure:** Pairs of students discuss one or more questions together. This very simple strategy can be done with planned questions, or can also be improvised at any point. "Turn to a partner and discuss, [insert question here]." It offers opportunities for everyone to talk about what they're thinking, as well as to hear ideas of others.

**Purpose:** Provides one-on-one thinking and talking time for students; practice listening and responding to peers. It helps keep everyone engaged in large groups.

### Whip-Around

**Procedure:** Provide a prompt and quickly get a response from each person in the group. When it's each students' turn, they say one or two words to answer—keep it brief and fast-moving. Instructor can ask follow-up questions of selected students if they want to go a little deeper.

**Purpose:** A quick and efficient check-in to get a baseline level of understanding from the whole group, and to seek out provocative statements to pursue more deeply.

### Thought Swap

**Procedure:**

1. **Choose a series of broad questions** on a topic that will be interesting and relevant to discuss.
2. **Line up participants and establish partners.** Include yourself and other adults in the partnering. Participants stand shoulder-to-shoulder to form two parallel lines, so each person is facing a partner. Participants standing side by side should be at least 6" apart.
3. **Explain procedure for discussing questions.** You'll provide a question for them to talk about with their partner across from them. They will have about a minute to talk. You will signal them to be quiet to prepare for the next question by gently touching the shoulder of the first two participants at your the end of the lines (the "touch of silence"). These two will then pass the touch on down the line, until the entire group is quiet.
4. **Begin the *Thought Swap*.** Pose the first question for participants to discuss.
5. **Share responses with group.** After about a minute, tap the first two participants at the ends of the lines and wait for the entire group to become silent. Repeat the question. Ask a few participants to share with the large group what their partner told them.
6. **Change partners for discussion.** Tell participants which one of the lines will shift with each question, while the other remains in place. Tell the person at the end of one line to walk down and rejoin the line at the opposite end. Have this line now shift one position to the left so everyone is facing a new person. Everyone now should have a new partner.
7. **Do the same with the other questions.**

**Purpose:** Facilitate more one-on-one peer discussions and provide an opportunity for the leader to engage in more in-depth discussions with individual students. Occasionally pursue interesting ideas and ask follow-up questions to ignite discussion with the whole group.

## Walk and Talk

See BEETLES *Walk and Talk* Student Activity Writeup for a thorough description, and question sets.

**Procedure:** The *Walk and Talk* routine uses essentially the same procedure as thought swap, but students discuss in lines while walking along a wide trail. In this setting, students can spend more time discussing with each person before they switch partners and prompts. The sharing out about their discussion should be spread out to every few questions, when everyone can stop and gather on the trail. There is also the opportunity to include spontaneous questions that are inspired by any discoveries or experiences that happen during the walk.

**Purpose:** Facilitate more one-on-one peer discussions and provide an opportunity for the leader to engage in more in-depth discussions with individual students, while moving the group along the trail. Distract students while covering territory, such as a steep hill. Keep the group together.

## Think-Pair-Share

**Procedure:**

1. **Think.** Give students an interesting broad question to think or write about briefly.
2. **Pair.** Pair students, and ask them to discuss the question(s) with their partner.
3. **Share.** Students share their discussion ideas with another pair of students or the instructor leads a whole group discussion about the topic.

**Purpose:** Provide individual thinking and reflection time as well as an opportunity for 1:1 peer discussion before sharing out with the whole group.

## Tape recorders

**Procedure:**

1. **Pair up students.** Assign partners, with one student as “talker,” the other as “tape recorder.”
2. **Explain roles.** The “talkers” role will be to say all they can think of about the topic you give them, until you say, “stop.” The “tape recorders” job will be to listen to everything she says until you announce, “stop,” then try to repeat as much of it back as possible, like a tape recorder.
3. **Begin talking and recording.** Provide a prompt or a question and tell students to begin discussing. After a couple of minutes, get the group’s attention and instruct them to switch roles.
4. **Discuss process.** Now tell them to briefly discuss in their teams how it felt to be a “talker” and “tape recorder.” After a few minutes, ask for a few comments to be shared with the whole class.

**Purpose:** Provide opportunities for students to practice listening to each other.

## Two Cents Routine

**Procedure:**

1. In small groups of about four people, students take turns talking. When it’s not their turn they listen and don’t talk.
2. First round (one cent). Each student in the group gets one minute to say what their ideas are on the topic.
3. Second round (two cents). Each student in the group gets one minute to respond to what others have said.

**Purpose:** Provides an opportunity for students to practice listening to each other and letting everyone speak in turn.