

30 Ways to Arrange Students for Group Work

 teachhub.com/classroom-management/2019/09/30-ways-to-arrange-students-for-group-work/

September 28, 2019



Students participating in group work is a key ingredient in student learning. When students are able to verbalize their ideas, listen to one another, share authentic discussion, and create common products, they are much more actively engaged in the learning process. However, there are a multitude of ways that a teacher can arrange students for group work, and an effective teacher may choose to implement different strategies for different outcomes. Look at the following ideas for how you might consider arranging students for group work.

Teacher-Assigned Groups

1. Grouped according to same skill level. Perfect for differentiation. You can have ability-specific tasks assigned to each group.
2. Turn your row and talk to the person next to you. Rows of students turn their desks to face one another. This is a very quick way to have students share ideas, listen, or team up with a partner.
3. Randomly mixed up pre-assigned groups. You might not need specific students together, but you do want speed. Pre-assign groups of students so that they just have to get together without long transition time.

4. Grouped to mix skill levels. Students learn well when different skills and levels are mixed. With this, you can make sure your strongest students are intermingled with others.
5. Rotational system. Instead of having one partner or group, students can set up in a circle, and a portion of each group rotates clockwise while the other portion stays in place.
6. Alphabetical rotation system. Group students based on the alphabetical order of their names; and if you choose, rotate them based on their names as well. You can go down your attendance roster listing A1, B1, C1, A2, B2, C2, etc. and reorganize groups based on letter or number. Get creative!
7. Day-of-the-week group. Assign each student to a specific partner or group for each day of the week. So if it's a Tuesday, have them get together with their Tuesday group, which is different from the other days. Students can also create each day's defined group.
8. Grouped for classroom management. We all know those friends who are more likely to get off task than create a quality product. Pre-assign groups and make sure students who need to be separated are kept apart.
9. Grouped according to interest. If you're aware of different interests of your students via discussion or a survey, you might want to put them together and have them connect their common interest to the task.

Students Choose Groups

10. Students select their own group. The simplest way could just be to tell students to get into groups and trust them to do it.
11. Students select their own group with exceptions. A variation from above, you can let them choose their groups but add, "Don't join with the last person you were with," or "No more than 'X' many people."
12. Students grouped based on responses. Give a survey or quiz, and group students according to what they think or how they score.
13. Clock partners. Give each student a clock chart, and have them go around assigning themselves a partner for each time of day. They'll have a one o'clock partner, a two o'clock partner, etc. Then you just say, "Get with your _____ o'clock partner."
14. Contact list. Like the clock partners, have students create their own contact list of classmates like they might on their phones. Then tell them, "Get with your third contact."

15. Students given options. Try describing what different group tasks are available, then letting students choose which task they'd like to join.
16. Students choose an option, and mix with others. You could also try letting students choose which task they'd like to do, but then creating a group consisting of students with each of the other tasks. In a reading class, you might have one student be a "vocab finder," one be a "summarizer," etc.
17. Students choose based on random interest. Have students mix based on something they are personally interested in. You can give them suggestions or categories of interests, and design their task to include that interest.

Randomized Group Work

18. Use sticks or names from a hat. Write students' names on Popsicle sticks, shake them up in a cup, and pop out the number of names you want in a group. Or you can literally pull names from a hat.
19. Use a grouping app or website. Many good apps and websites exist for randomly assigning groups. Try a website like [Group Sort](#).
20. Use colored index cards. Let students choose colored index cards from a stack, and sort them based on the colors they picked up. You can even write items on the cards that further indicate tasks or topics.
21. Count off. Of course you can count off by numbers, but maybe try something fun. If you want four groups, then count off by "Shakespeare, Dickens, Chaucer, and Swift," for example.
22. "Left Out" Game. Have your students stand up, and then you shout out a number. Students must immediately cluster themselves according to that number. Anyone left out gets a bonus task.
23. Use a pack of cards. Playing cards is effective and versatile. Pass out cards and group students based on having similar or different suits, black or red cards, cards in a specific order, the same numbers, or any other values you assign to the deck.
24. Use synonym vocabulary word cards. Have sets of synonyms written on different index cards and randomly pass them out. Then have students find the other person in the room who has the word that means the same as their card. Also try antonyms!
25. Famous pairings. A variation on the synonym cards, pass out cards that have various pairs of duos that pertain to your course. Have "Huck Finn" and "Mark Twain" cards, or "Einstein" and "E=MC²" cards.

26. Puzzle pieces. Take small puzzles and have students randomly select a piece. Then have them find the other students who have the rest of that puzzle's pieces.
27. Arrange desks. If students have assigned desks, confuse them by rearranging the desks before they come in for the day.
28. Birthday buddies. Who has their birthday in the same month as you? Ask students that question, and group them accordingly.
29. Pick colored pencils/markers. When creating a poster or colorful project, have students grab one colored utensil and ask them to mix with others with different colors.
30. Line it up and fold it. Ask students to line up in response to a question or trait. They could line up by height, or perhaps line up based on a spectrum of how much they know about the day's topic. Then fold the line in half, so the least knowledgeable student is paired with the most knowledgeable student and so on.