

Structured Oral Language Practice Routines

There are countless strategies and variations of strategies for student groups and structuring interaction. We have selected nine routines that collectively provide distinct interactions and are easy to implement individually.

1. Talking Stick
2. Talking Chips
3. Think, Pair, Share
4. Numbered Heads Together
5. Three Step Interview
6. Give One, Get One
7. Clock Partners
8. Lines of Communication
9. Whip Around

Talking Stick

This strategy is structured so that each student has the opportunity to speak multiple times- even reticent speakers are compelled to contribute. Students can “pass” (decline to respond) only once. This permits them to hear others in their small group before having to contribute.

Students pass any object that can serve as the “talking stick” around the group – first clockwise, and later, randomly.

The teacher gives a prompt and indicates the number or letter of the group member to begin. The first student with the “talking stick” speaks while everyone listens. The student then passes the object to the left. The process continues until everyone in the group has had a chance to speak or until the teacher gives a signal to stop.

To extend the activity, once everyone in the group has had a turn speaking, anyone in the group may ask for another turn by saying something like, “I’d like to add another thought. Please, hand me the talking stick.”

Talking Chips

Each member receives the same number of chips (plastic markers, pennies). Each time a member wishes to speak, he or she puts a chip in the center of the table. Once individuals have used up their chips, they can no longer speak. The discussion continues until all members have exhausted their supply of chips.

This is an excellent activity to both encourage reticent speakers to contribute (they have to use up their “talking chips”) and limit the domination of those more assertive and confident (they must limit contributions to the number of “talking chips”).

General Guidelines

The goal is to have snappy pacing that allows for plenty of structured practice without losing instructional time. Some guidelines:

- Invest a bit of time to explain and model the procedure for a new *Structured Oral Practice Routine* so students know exactly what to do.
- Model with a small group fishbowl so students can see and hear how it works. Invite a student to read his or her answer to the group to kick things off.
- Post graphic organizers with content words and sentence frames, sentence starters, and signal words you expect students to use during the activity.
- Be clear on about your expectations. What is the purpose – what will they learn? What should each person do? What would “success” look/sound like?
- Establish clear signals for beginning and ending the activity.
- Circulate and listen closely to monitor for participation and accuracy. Offer support.
- Debrief by recording contributions on a chart. Have students add the most interesting ones to their notes.
- A brief written product (paragraph, note sheet, poster, index card) helps ensure individual accountability.

Numbered Heads Together

This routine is effective when students are solving problems or responding to questions that have a specific right answer.

1. In teams of four, each student numbers off from 1 to 4.
2. A question or problem is presented. Students put their heads together to discuss the answer for a set amount of time. They must make sure everyone on the team knows the answer.
3. Teacher randomly calls a number from 1 to 4 (use a spinner, draw number card, roll a die, etc.)
4. On each team, the student whose number was called writes the answer on a white board. They may not receive any help from their team at this point. They place the response board face down when ready.
5. When all teams are ready, have the designated student stand and hold up their response board to show their answer. Check each team's answer for accuracy.

Variation: Call on individual teams. The student with the selected number must stand and orally respond for the team using a public speaking voice.

Three-Step Interview

This routine is effective when students are responding to questions that *do not* have a specific right answer.

1. Present an issue about which varying opinions exist and pose several questions for the class to consider.
2. Students work in pairs. One is the interviewer; the other is the interviewee. Each interview lasts two to three minutes.
3. At the signal, partners switch roles.

Variation: After the each set of partners have interviewed each other, have them pair with another set of partners. Each partner shares his or her *partner's* idea with the others.

Depending on your goals for the work, you may:

- Have the groups of four synthesize their ideas and list commonalities and differences on a chart to be posted and shared orally, or as a Gallery Walk so students can read each other's ideas.
- Invite several students to share their own or their partner's ideas as you chart them. As you go, have students indicate agreement with a "thumbs up". Once you have collected a few distinct ideas, ask whether there are any other ideas not yet reflected.
- Use these charts as a basis for asking students to write a summary of the interview results.

Give One, Get One

In this whole-class activity, students have a task – to give and get information. They walk around the classroom and randomly select partners with whom to share information and get new information about an assigned topic.

Clock Appointments

The variety of partner combinations in this activity encourages a range of interactions for practicing language. Distribute a clock face to each student with space to write at the 12:00, 3:00, 6:00 and 9:00 spaces. Have the class walk around and make an appointment with other students for each of the four time slots. It works best if they begin at 12:00 and work clockwise. Inevitably, there will be a few students with empty slots. You may have to help ensure everyone's appointments are full by asking whether anyone is missing a clock appointment and facilitating matching students who need appointments.

When it is time for students to practice with one another, announce, "Find your 12:00 o'clock (or 3:00, 6:00 or 9:00) appointment and tell him or her three things _____. Be sure to use one of the sentence frames to share your idea."

Lines of Communication

This language practice structure provides multiple opportunities for language production. Repeated practice in a low-stress situation gives shy or reluctant students more confidence to share and take risks.

1. Teacher gives a prompt or asks a question.
2. Students stand in two rows facing each other.
3. Students take turns responding to the prompt with the person standing across from them, and then discuss together for 30-seconds to one-minute.
4. At the signal (bell, musical cue, chimes, etc.), students wrap up their comments or discussion and move one position to the left. The student at the end of one of the lines who is left without a partner moves down the center aisle to the far position of the opposite line to find a new partner.
5. Teacher gives a new prompt and the procedure continues until everyone has had a chance to share with every other member of the group or all long as interest and focus remains.

Whip Around

This is a good activity to summarize learning or get everyone's voice in the room. It is often used as a wrap-up to the day's class.

1. Pose a question that encourages students to reflect on a response. Have them jot down two or three possible responses utilizing frames that you have provided.
2. Whip around the room having each student share one of his or her responses using a public speaking voice.

A more structured variation

1. Preparation: Generate 30 questions (or enough so that there is one per student. Write two questions #1 and #2 on a card, #2 and #3 on the next, #3 and #4 on the next and so on.
2. Distribute one to each student and permit time for everyone to jot a response to the FIRST questions on his or her card. They may work in partners to help each other generate a response.
3. Begin with a volunteer who reads the question and response. Then asks, "Who has...?"
4. The person with that question states the response and asks, "Who has...?" Continue until everyone has contributed.