

## Cooperative Learning Techniques

### ASK THREE BEFORE ME

#### Purpose

Routine questions like “Where do we write our name?” and “What’s the date?” usually do not need a response directly from the teacher. The Ask Three Before Me strategy frees you to answer those questions that clearly require teacher input and to assist students in genuine need. It also helps students and teams take more responsibility for their own learning by reinforcing the idea that they can depend on someone other than the teacher for help.

#### Breaking It Down

- Before students begin any activity, make it clear that if they have questions, they need to ask three other people (teammates or students nearby) before coming to you.
- Firmly enforce the rule. Whenever a student asks you a question, your response should be, “Did you ask three before me?” If they have not consulted others, defer the question first to teammates or nearby students.
- If the student still has not received a satisfactory answer after asking three people for help, you should then offer assistance.

#### Fine-Tuning the Technique

- Consistency is key, especially early in the year. If you find that the strategy is not taking hold, make a conscious effort to respond to student questions by asking, “Have you asked three before me?” Over time, this repetition will set and reinforce the standard.
- Initially, you might want to post the rule on the board as a reminder for students.
- Another way to establish Ask Three Before Me in your classroom is to make it apart of the weekly team cooperation goal and to award team cooperation points whenever you notice teams using the strategy.
- Students should consult those closest to them, not their friends across the room. If volume is a problem, work with students on appropriate voice levels, for instance by practicing “indoor” voices or “six-inch” voices instead of “outdoor” voices.
- As students gain experience working together, you can extend the strategy to higher-order thinking questions as well. The more you encourage students to consult their classmates first, the more you reinforce effective teamwork and problem-solving skills.

## THINK-PAIR-SHARE

### Purpose

As with Random Reporter, this simple questioning technique keeps all students involved in class discussions and provides an opportunity for every child to share an answer to every question. It takes the fear out of class discussion by allowing students to think carefully about their answers and talk about them with a partner before they are called on to respond. For shy or tentative students, this can help put the emphasis back on learning instead of on simply surviving class. The technique was developed by Frank Lyman of the University of Maryland (1981).

### Breaking It Down

To use Think-Pair-Share, follow these steps:

- Ask the question.
- Have students individually **think** about an answer for a few seconds.
- Allow students to **discuss** their answer with a partner for a few seconds.
- Finally, have students **share** in teams or call on a few students to share their answers with the class.



### Fine-Tuning the Technique

- There is no magic amount of “think” time and “pair” time. In general, depending on the complexity of the question, allow students to think for five or six seconds, and to pair for perhaps ten seconds. You want to give them just enough time to think and to spark some ideas in their partner, but not enough time to get off-task.
- Give a specific task when asking students to pair. For example, say “Take ten seconds to talk with your partner and come up with one answer to the question” or “Talk with your partner for a few seconds and see if you can come up with two solutions to the problem.”
- When it comes time for students to share their responses (in partners, in teams, or as a class), anything doesn’t go. Students need to provide correct, well reasoned, clearly explained answers. Use questioning to help students or teams flesh out their answers. Model the elements that make an answer stronger - phrasing the answer as a complete sentence, using words instead of gestures, supporting answers with evidence, and so forth.