

Tips for making the most of “group” time

1) Keep it focused.

- a. Have specific problems/tasks for students.
- b. Watch the time. If needed, give a time limit or guideline. If groups are getting off task, move the class forward. They will quickly learn that being off task sends you the message that they are done or bored, and that tells you to keep things moving and/or give them more work.
- c. If a problem has a lot of text, have the students read it in their groups before they start.
- d. Ask groups to re-read the problem as needed.
- e. Prompt them with questions to keep them thinking about connections and concepts.
- f. As you circulate, check to be sure that groups have similar work as evidence that they have worked together. If you see a lot of disagreement in their work, ask them to talk to each other. Then COME BACK to make sure they had indeed reached a consensus.

2) Keep it safe.

- a. Allow students to try again and to fix their mistakes. If they stumble, allow another student to help out.
- b. Encourage discussion of ineffective strategies and common mistakes.
- c. Encourage positive interactions within groups. If needed, seize a teachable moment and talk about the difference between criticizing an idea and criticizing a person.
- d. Do not allow kids to laugh at or make fun of each other when they make a mistake. Students often do not realize how this can prevent others from sharing their ideas and thoughts.

3) Keep it positive.

- a. Give positive feedback as much as or even more than the negative feedback.
- b. Keep the feedback specific, like “good strategy for that problem”, “nice labels on that graph” and “you did a good job of breaking that down into subproblems.”

4) Keep it special.

- a. Group time is not a right; it is a privilege. Students can and should be separated from groups as their behavior warrants.
- b. Try not to do group work all the time, because...
 - i. Some students will not listen to the teacher when they are in a group. They may hear you, but they don't listen.
 - ii. Some students are introverted and being in a group takes a lot of effort.
 - iii. Some students will rely on the group too much and do not learn to think on their own.
- c. Mix it up. Have students work in pairs at times to keep conversation focused and to keep every student active.

5) Keep it real.

- a. Keep tasks challenging and thoughtful enough to warrant group time.
- b. Choose directional words and questions to encourage group interaction. Examples: Compare, discuss strategies, why does ~ work, does it always work, find a counterexample, why does ~ not work, what if.....
- c. Remember that the goal is to keep students THINKING, so give groups prompts and extension questions to guide and push forward their thinking. We want the sum to be greater than the individual parts!