

## DISCUSSION ROUTINES

An important part of the learning process is having opportunities to discuss with others. The activity structures—or routines—that follow offer opportunities for learners to discuss while in the field. These routines can be used to discuss virtually any topic.

### *Turn & Talk*

**Procedure:** Pairs of learners discuss one or more questions. This very simple strategy can be done with planned questions, or it can be improvised at any point. The instructor says, “Turn to a partner and discuss [insert question here].” This routine offers opportunities for everyone to discuss what they’re thinking, as well as to hear ideas of others.

**Purpose:** Offers 1:1 thinking and discussing time for learners; practice listening and responding to peers. It helps keep everyone engaged in large groups. When a large-group discussion stalls because no one has a response to a question, the instructor can say, “Okay, let’s all discuss our ideas about this for X minutes. Turn and Talk!”

### *Dominoes*

**Procedure:** Quickly go from person to person in the group. When it’s each learner’s turn, they say one or two words to answer the prompt. The instructor can ask follow-up questions to a few learners or to the group 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 (formerly known as Walk & Talk)*

See BEETLES [Thought Swap](#) Student Activity write-up for a thorough description and question sets.

#### **Procedure—Moving Version:**

- **Choose a series of broad questions.** Choose a series of broad questions on a topic that will be interesting to discuss.
- **Arrange participants in two parallel lines.** Participants in each line stand shoulder to shoulder, with the two lines facing each other. Each person partners with the person directly across from them in the other line. Include yourself in one of the lines so you have a partner.
- **Share the procedure for discussing questions.** You’ll offer a question for pairs to discuss as they are moving side-by-side along a trail. They will have a few minutes to discuss. You will signal them with a “wave of silence” to stop and be quiet and then call on a few people to share some of what their partner told them. Then, prepare everyone for the next question or statement.
- **Change partners before you give the next prompt.** Let participants know which of the lines will shift with each question while the other line remains in place. Tell the person at the end of one line to move down and rejoin the line at the opposite end. Have this line now shift one position forward so everyone is facing a new person who becomes their partner. Pose the next question or prompt.
- **Do the same with the other questions.** It’s good to start the whole-group sharing by asking people to share something interesting their partner said, to encourage listening, and then sometimes ask

## DISCUSSION ROUTINES (continued)

learners to voice their own thoughts. For the moving version it is ideal, but not necessary, if some of the questions relate to the place you are moving through, so you are encouraging participants to look around.

### Procedure—Stationary Version:

Everything is the same as in the Moving Version, except that participants remain in place in their lines during pair discussions and are not moving to another location while discussing.

**Purpose:** Facilitates 1:1 peer discussions and gives the leader an opportunity to engage in discussions with individual learners. Also reveals interesting ideas to pursue with follow-up questions to ignite discussion with the whole group. Asking learners to share something their partner told them helps learners practice listening, which is an important foundation to good discussions and a key strategy for promoting language development. The Moving Version helps learners remain focused on topics during transitions. It also distracts learners while covering territory, such as a steep hill, and helps keep the group together.

### Think-Pair-Share

#### Procedure:

- **Think.** Give learners an interesting, broad question to think or write about briefly.
- **Pair.** Pair learners and ask them to discuss their responses to the question(s) with their partners.
- **Share.** Learners share their discussion ideas with another pair, or the instructor leads a whole-group discussion about the topic.

**Purpose:** Gives learners individual thinking and reflection time as well as 1:1 peer discussion before sharing with the whole group.

### Tape Recorders

#### Procedure:

- **Pair up learners.** Assign partners, with one learner as “talker” and the other as “tape recorder.”
- **Share roles.** The “talker” role will be to say all they can about the topic (of the prompt you will offer) for 2 minutes, until you say, “Stop.” The “tape recorder’s” job will be to listen to everything their partner says without saying anything until you announce, “Stop.” Then you’ll say, “Rewind” and a few seconds later, “Play back!” The “tape recorder” will have 2 minutes to try to repeat back as much of what their partner said as possible, just like a tape recorder.
- **Begin talking and recording.** Offer a prompt or a question and have learners begin. After 2 minutes, stop and play back. After 2 more minutes, get the group’s attention and ask them to switch roles. Repeat the process with a different prompt.



## DISCUSSION ROUTINES (continued)

- **Discuss the process.** Now, tell learners to discuss in groups of four how it felt to be a “talker” and a “tape recorder.” After a few minutes, ask for a few comments to be shared with the whole group.

**Purpose:** Gives learners opportunities to practice listening to and understanding each other. Highlights abilities that some learners didn’t know they had (some might be remarkably proficient at remembering and repeating back verbatim) or abilities they need to work on.

### *Two Cents*

#### **Procedure:**

- **Form small groups of about 4–6 learners.** Learners take turns speaking. When it’s not their turn, they listen and don’t speak.
- **First round (1 cent).** Each learner in the group gets 1 minute to say what their ideas are on the topic or prompt offered by the instructor.
- **Second round (2 cents).** Each learner in the group gets 1 minute to respond to what others have said.

**Purpose:** Gives learners an opportunity to practice listening to one another and letting everyone speak in turn.