

Examples of small group techniques

(<http://www.theorywatch.com/ist501/grpelicit.html>):

Breakout groups are subdivisions of a larger meeting to deal with specific issues. Small groups meet in separate areas -- corners of a large room or several smaller rooms. Each group appoints or elects a discussion leader, and each participant has a chance to express an opinion. Afterwards, groups report back to the large meeting.

Study circles hold a series of meetings to discuss critical issues. Members are assigned readings and other tasks between meetings. Encourage students to create their own study groups/circles beyond the tutorial setting.

Round. Everyone sits or stands in a circle and responds to the same question. They think or write it out for a minute and then have 30 seconds to respond. This is a good way to get all students to participate in a session

Stations. Create a set of five theme areas or concepts you wish to cover. In each, create five questions. In your tutorial section, set up five stations, each with one theme/concept. Break your class into five groups. Have each group answer one question at each station. After a specified amount of time, have each group rotate to the next station. Continue until all questions at all stations have been answered (provide paper or flip charts at each station). Have the each group summarise the answers for the whole class. (NOTE: this exercise takes a long time and is well suited to mid-term or final review, using a whole tutorial session)

Fishbowl. Useful especially when many students have not done the readings for the week. Teams of three or four work on a problem or exercise, or discuss a reading. At the same time, other teams of three or four observe the first teams. In particular, the first teams work on seeking other points-of-view, listening to and paraphrasing ideas, and other communication skills while solving the given problem. The second teams focus their attention on the team dynamic and make sure they are prepared to discuss how well or poorly the first teams worked together to solve the problem. (There is sometimes the tendency of the second teams to focus on the problem rather than the team dynamic.) After some time (even if every team has not finished the problem), the class discusses what happened and what didn't happen during the activity.

Line. Students stand in a line. Each end of the line represents a particular stance on a given topic or question. All participants stand on the part of the line that represents their views. To find your position, talk to the person on either side of you in the line-up to find out if you are in the right place in relation to others. This strategy is useful for "hot" discussion topics where people often have very strong opinions. It lets students feel confident about their own position – because they *need* to find a place in the line. It shows that all viewpoints are respected.

Snowball. Ask a question of the class (for example to define a difficult concept). Have each student turn to their neighbour and come up with an answer (to the best of their ability). After a pre-determined amount of time, have each pair turn to another pair and repeat the process. Repeat as needed for the size of the tutorial class. When you are left with two to four groups, have each summarise their understanding of the concept(s).

Brainstorming. Brainstorming is a good way to generate idea for discussion. Students contribute ideas without any discussion, elaboration, or criticism. After the brainstorming exercise, students go through the various ideas and choose the ones they would like to pursue.

Buzz Groups. Students discuss a particular topic or question in small groups (2-3 people). The discussion is continued in the large group. Students who normally would not contribute will feel confident giving their opinion out loud once they have had it validated by a few peers.

One-Minute Paper. In order to get feedback on what students understood from lecture or the readings, a one-minute paper that you collect, read and do not grade allows you to find out how to gear your lesson plan. You can incorporate the one-minute papers into the participation grade. The one-minute paper gives you a chance to see where students are in their understanding of the material. This can become part of other small group exercises and can be a way to create focus for the tutorial.

Think/Write/Pair/Discuss. To get students to articulate their ideas about a concept/problem in writing can help foster discussion. By using the TWPD you do not have to read the answers provided by students, you can ask them to discuss their writing with each other, in pairs or in threes and then take up the answers generated with the whole class.

Jigsaw. If there is reading material (such as background, or particularly difficult course material that students are having trouble with) to be digested before doing an activity, split it up into 3 or 4 self-contained parts. Divide the class into the same number of Reading Groups, with one member from each team. Give one part of the reading to each team to digest and to prepare to explain to their team. Then rearrange the students so that each team has someone who has read one of the self-contained parts, and have each student teach his/her part of the reading to the rest of the team.

Word Webbing. As a team or individually, open-ended or with concepts provided by the teacher, students construct a concept map within a specified domain. If done in teams, each member should have a different colour of pen. This can be coupled with the creation of a dictionary of terms for your course that students have to compile (individually or as a class) from the weekly readings.

Roving Reporter. When a team gets stuck, one member is allowed to roam the room looking for ideas and reports back to the team.

Two-Box (or Two-Column) Induction. The teacher puts items into one of two boxes (usually on the blackboard) without telling students what the criteria are for sorting the items. As the teacher adds items to the two boxes, students (standing in teams) discuss the items and possible categories. When a team decides that they know how the sort was done, they sit down without revealing their answer. (This is a non-disruptive way of letting the teacher know how the individual teams are doing.) When all teams are seated, there are three different options:

1. Ask each team to add an item to each box, and let the other teams evaluate and

comment on the choices

2. Present additional items to the class, and ask teams to decide which box each item belongs in.