

Progressive pair and group work

Most teachers use pair and group work in class to give more chance for learners to interact and to generate a co-operative classroom atmosphere. But we can also use pair work and group work techniques as a way of repeating activities without learners losing interest. Interacting several times with different people in this way can help learners improve their language and develop fluency.

Here are examples of two possible patterns.

Pairs → New pairs

Learners prepare what they will say in pairs, then try out the activity with several new partners in turn. This works well for any improvised interaction, e.g. a role play.

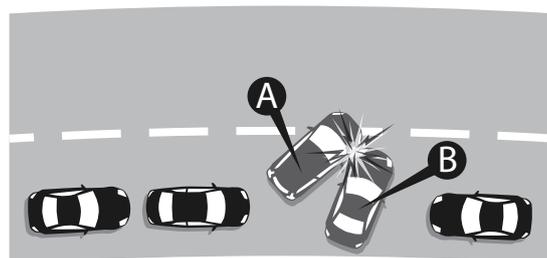
- 1 *Preparation.* Divide the class into pairs (extra learners can form a group of three). Letter each pair A or B (so both learners in the pair have the same letter), and give each pair one of the driver's role cards below. Working together, they prepare what they will say to the other driver. They could also make brief notes.

Driver A

You were looking for a place to park. You saw B signalling to pull out of a parking place, so you stopped and waited. Then B stopped signalling, so you drove on. Just then, B suddenly pulled out and crashed into you.

Driver B

You were signalling to pull out of a parking place. You saw A in your mirror coming along the road, so you waited. Then A stopped and signalled, so you pulled out. As you pulled out, A started again and crashed into you.



- 2 *Interaction (1).* Learners form new pairs, so that each pair now has one A and one B. They improvise the conversation.
- 3 *Interaction (2).* The A learner in each pair moves on to the next pair, so they can have the conversation again with a new partner. If you like, do the same thing again for a third conversation.
- 4 *Round-up.* Ask who 'won' the argument each time: A or B? Ask what their arguments were.

The second and third conversations give learners a chance to improve their arguments and express themselves more fluently. But the repetition doesn't become boring as each interaction will be slightly different and will reflect individual personalities.

Groups → New groups

Learners in each group are given a different piece of information (e.g. a story). Then one learner tells the information to a new group, then a learner from that group tells it to the next group, and so on round the class.

- 1 *Reading and preparation.* Divide the class into groups of three, four or five, depending on the size of your class. Give each group a number (1, 2, 3 ...) and each learner in every group a letter (A, B, C ...). Give each group a different anecdote. They read it and practise telling it.

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2 *Re-telling.* Collect the anecdotes. The A learners from each group move to the next group and tell their group's anecdote from memory. The others make sure they understand it. (So the A learner from Group 1 will tell Group 2, and so on.)

Then the B learners from each group move to the next group and tell *the anecdote they just heard* (not their original anecdote).

Next, the C learners from each group move to the next group and tell the anecdote they just heard. And so on in the same way until each anecdote has been told to all the groups.

3 *Round-up.* Ask the last learner from each group (C, D or E, depending on your group size) to tell the last anecdote they heard. Then check back with the group who originally read the anecdote to see if the details are the same. Usually the information has changed as it has gone round the groups.

This activity gives intensive practice in listening carefully and reproducing meaning, and gets a lot of 'mileage' out of the same short text without getting boring. It also means that everyone has a chance to tell one of the stories.

This activity can be done using any kind of narrative text (jokes, anecdotes, items from newspapers) or other kinds of information, such as instructions, recipes or simple explanations of how things work. It also works well with visual information (e.g. short cartoon strips, paintings or photos with plenty of action in them) – in this case, groups start by looking at their own picture and then describe it to the next group without showing it.

If possible, the group size should be fairly even and should be roughly the same as the number of groups (so a split of three groups of three, three or four groups of four is ideal).