

Pairing Strategies

Later in the semester, you may want to invite students to choose their own partners for dyads. But in the early weeks, students are likely to either choose familiar friends or to feel a lot of anxiety about revealing themselves through their choices or feeling rejected, not chosen, or left out. It can be a relief for them to not have to make these choices.

You may want to choose the dyads, keeping a record of who pairs with whom each week so that over the semester you give them the opportunity to make personal contact with as many different students as possible. Or you may want to use a variety of methods that rely on chance. The simplest of these involves determining the total number of the group; for example, if there are twenty students and adults total, each member of the group counts off—from one to ten and then from one to ten again. Each person then seeks the person with the same number to form his or her dyad.

There are more elaborate ways of creating pairs. You can bring in two decks of playing cards so you have doubles of each number and suit. Students pick a card and find the person with the matching card. You can also use any other paired images or categories.

Using a pairing activity early in the period has many advantages. It allows students to quickly feel seen and heard. It helps build students' confidence for sharing in the group. And, if you do random pairing, it breaks up the natural tendency for students to sit with their friends. If you make a routine of asking students to sit with their partner when they return to the circle, you will have naturally broken up some of the groups of students who encourage each other to distract themselves and the group from the focus of the class.