

1 | When should I have students work in pairs or groups rather than individually or as a whole class?

Varying your classroom organization to suit particular activity types will result in more effective and more interesting classes. Many students are not accustomed to working in pairs or groups, so it is important to use these groupings only when they are most beneficial.

■ **Whole-class teaching** maximizes teacher control and is especially good for:

- presenting information, giving explanations, and providing instructions
- showing material in texts and pictures or on audio or video recordings
- teacher-led drills (such as substitution or transformation) or dictations
- reviewing answers or sharing ideas after students have completed an activity
- enabling the whole class to benefit from teacher feedback to individuals

■ **Students working individually** allows quiet, concentrated attention and is most effective for:

- processing information or completing a task at students' own pace
- performing writing tasks

For objective exercises such as fill-in-the-blank, matching, multiple-choice, and editing, vary your class organization to keep student motivation high. Students can sometimes complete these exercises individually, and sometimes they can work with a partner.

■ **Students working in pairs** maximizes student speaking time, breaks up the routine and “teacher talk,” and is ideal for:

- information-gap activities
- role plays
- writing and/or reading dialogues
- predicting the content of reading and listening texts
- comparing notes on what students listen to or see
- checking answers
- peer assessment

Pair work can also be very effective for completing objective exercises such as fill-in-the-blank, matching, multiple-choice, and editing.

■ **Students working in groups** creates ideal conditions for students to learn from each other and works well for:

- generating ideas
- pooling knowledge
- writing group stories
- preparing presentations
- discussing an issue and reaching a group decision

2 | How should I set up pair work and group work?

Here are a few different techniques:

- **Streaming.** Grouping students according to ability or participation has certain advantages.
 - **ability:** Grouping weaker and stronger students together allows more able students to help their less fluent classmates.
 - **participation:** If you see that some students participate less than others, you could make a pair or group of weak participators. By the same token, you can also put especially talkative students together.
- **Chance.** Grouping students by chance has many benefits, especially if it results in students working with varied partners. You can group students by chance according to:
 - **where they sit:** Students sitting next to or near one another work in pairs or groups. This is the easiest option, but if students always sit in the same place, you will want to find other ways of grouping them.
 - **the “wheels” system:** Half the class stands in a circle facing outward, and the other half stands in an outer circle facing inward. The outer circle revolves in a clockwise direction, and the inner circle revolves in a counterclockwise direction. When you tell them to stop, students work with the person facing them. This is an effective way to have students engage in meaningful repetition, such as asking the same question of many different partners.
 - **assigned letters:** Assign each student a letter from A to E. Then ask all the As to form a group, all the Bs to form a group, and so on.
 - **birthdays:** Students stand in a line in the order of their birthdays (with January at one end and December at the other). The first five students form one group, the second five students another group, and so on.
 - **native language:** If possible, put students in groups or pairs with others who don’t share a native language. This helps create an “English-only” classroom.

3 | How can I make activities more successful?

Before the activity:

- **Motivate students and explain the purpose.** Make it clear that something enjoyable or interesting is going to happen. Explain the rationale for the activity. Make sure students understand that the purpose of the activity is to help them practice what they learned and encourage them to participate.
- **Provide clear directions.** Explain what students should do in every step of the activity. Have students paraphrase or demonstrate the task to be sure they understand it.
- **Demonstrate.** Show the class what is supposed to happen in an activity. This might involve asking a student to demonstrate the activity with you or having two students role-play at the front of the room.

- **Provide a time frame.** It is helpful for students to know how much time they have and exactly when they should stop. Approximate times are given for all the activities in this Teacher's Manual.

For open-ended activities, such as the writing exercises, you will also want to:

- **Stimulate thinking.** When there are choices for students to make, it is often helpful to set up small-group and/or whole-class brainstorming sessions to define the focus and/or content of their task.
- **Prepare language.** Review grammar and vocabulary that students may need to complete the task. This can be done as a follow-up to a brainstorming activity where you elicit ideas and write key language on the board.

During the activity:

- **Observe students.** Walk around the room watching and listening to pairs or groups.
- **Provide assistance as needed.** (See FAQ 5 for suggestions on giving feedback and correcting errors.)

After the activity:

- **Elicit student responses.** For some activities, you may ask for volunteers or call on students to share some of their ideas with the class. For other types of activities, a few pairs or groups can be asked to role-play their discussions to demonstrate the language they have been using.
- **Provide feedback.** In many cases, this is most conveniently done in a whole-class setting. It may be preferable, however, for you to meet with individuals, pairs, or groups. While the principal focus in a grammar class is language use, it is also important to acknowledge the value of students' ideas. See FAQ 5 for suggestions on feedback and error correction.

4 | What can I do to encourage students to use more English in the classroom?

It is perfectly natural for students to feel the need to use their first language in an English class. There are a number of actions that teachers can take to promote the use of English.

- **Set clear guidelines.** Some teachers in monolingual classes find that activities such as providing vocabulary definitions, presenting a grammar point, checking comprehension, giving instructions, and discussing classroom methodology are best done in the students' native language.
- **Use persuasion.** Walking among the students during speaking activities and saying things such as "Please speak English!" or "Try to use English as much as possible" helps to ensure that students will speak English most of the time.

5 | What's the best approach to giving feedback and correcting errors?

Here are two considerations:

- **Be selective in offering correction.** Students can't focus on everything at once, so concentrate first on errors relating to the target grammar point and grammar points from units previously studied, as well as any errors that interfere with communication. Whether you respond to other errors depends on your judgment of students' readiness to take in the information. If you see a teachable moment, seize it. Rather than correct every error individual students make in the course of activities, it is generally preferable to note commonly occurring mistakes and give a short presentation for the whole class at the end of the activity.
- **Recasting.** If a student makes an error, for example, "I *didn't came* to class yesterday because I was sick," you can recast it as, "You *didn't come* to class yesterday because you were sick?" The student ideally notices the difference and restates the original sentence: "Right. I didn't come to class yesterday because I was sick." This process can be effective because the student has the opportunity to self-correct an error that is still in short-term memory. As a variation, you can restate but stop, with rising intonation, right before the potential error: "You didn't . . . ?"

6 | What can I do to accommodate different learning styles?

Focus on Grammar recognizes different styles of learning and provides a variety of activities to accommodate these different styles. Some learners prefer an analytical, or rule-learning (deductive), approach. Others, especially younger learners, respond best to an inductive approach, or exposure to the language in meaningful contexts. Indeed, the same students may adopt different styles as they learn, or they may use different styles at different times. As teachers, we want to help the students in our classes who prefer to follow rules become more able to take risks and to plunge into communicative activities. We also want to encourage the risk-takers to focus on accuracy. *Focus on Grammar* provides the variety to ensure that students achieve their goal: to learn to use the language confidently and appropriately.