



Making Time to Talk

Learn more about the importance of discussions within your instruction on [AdLit](#) and [Reading Rockets](#).

Student discussions are an essential element of learning. As students listen and reflect on others' reactions and questions, their own understanding increases. Yet, how often do you strategically plan student-led discussions within your instruction? If you are doing most of the talking, you might be doing most of the thinking. Let's consider how you can easily shift your use of golden instructional time to include and support student discussions. You might just find you have more engaged and curious learners as well!

Reflection #1: Discussion Norms

To have active, focused discussions you must first establish some discussion norms for things like taking turns, respecting each other's opinions, and actively listening.

- **Teaching Tip:** For younger learners, holding a popsicle stick or another "talking stick" while speaking can remind partners or group members whose turn it is to speak and acts as a visual reminder of whom they should be listening to.

Reflection #2: Types of Discussions

Do your students have opportunities to discuss with partners, small groups, and with you? If not, consider how you can build in different types of discussions within your instruction. Giving students opportunities to divide into groups in different ways for discussions ensures that groups remain fluid and students' perspectives are expanded.

- **Teaching Tip:** Determining how students are grouped is important. For younger learners, having a visual chart on a screen or up in the classroom is often helpful. For older students, you may use a mix of strategic and random groupings across a quarter. Knowing that group membership is not stagnant can motivate students to engage in the discussions.



Reflection #3: To Write or Not to Write, that Is the Question

Should discussion groups be anchored by a graphic organizer or reading guide? The power of graphic organizers and reading guides is not in filling them out but in using them as a springboard for discussions. They can help students organize their ideas, anchor their thinking, and spark discussions, but filling them out shouldn't come at the expense of the discussion. You want to intentionally plan how you will use these tools to get students thinking and talking. Longer writing tasks can be extensions of the classroom discussions that students work on independently.

- **Teaching Tip:** Exit slips are a quick and easy way to incorporate a writing task into classroom discussions and provide you with an indication of what students discussed and learned. Learn more about exit slips on [AdLit](#) and [Reading Rockets](#).

Additional Resources

- ▶ **Video:** [Engaging Adolescents in Discussions About Text](#)
- ▶ **Article and video:** [Speaking and Listening in Content Area Learning](#)