

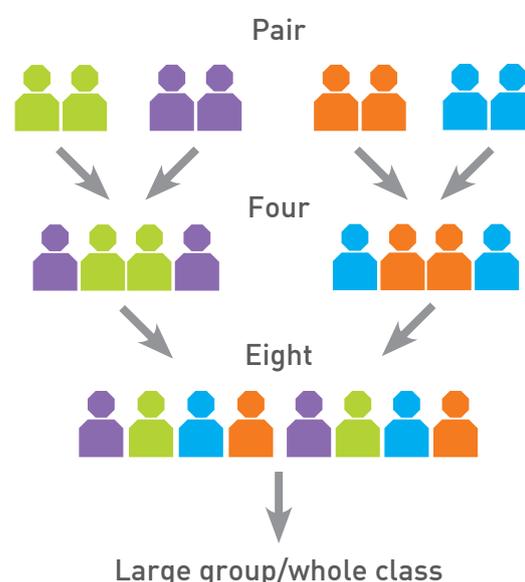
Discussion formats

A good format will help you to structure a discussion lesson. The formats below are designed to encourage participation and help students feel comfortable expressing their opinions and exploring the topic. These formats work well with a broad range of discussion topics and engage a variety of learning styles.

Snowball discussion

'Snowball' is a good format to help less confident students voice their opinions in smaller groups and build up to a whole-class discussion.

- Students begin by discussing the topic in pairs.
- The pairs then join another pair to make a four, and so on until the whole class is back together.
- Students can summarise their points as the groups grow.



Marketplace

The 'marketplace' is a good format to use when there are several different angles or ideas to be explored.

- Divided the class into 4–6 **research groups**.
- Give each research group information about the topic from a specific sub-topic or viewpoint.
- Each research group's members become 'experts' on their topic area.
- Then create **expert conference groups** with one representative from each of the original groups.
- The 'experts' share and discuss their research with each other so that by the end everybody has information on all the topic areas.
- If there is time, open out the discussion to involve the whole class.



Role-play/performance

Role-play is a good format to use: if the whole class agrees on a topic; to direct students away from controversial opinions; and to ensure all sides of a topic are covered.

Students may act out a scenario about a topic in character, or can adopt a specific point of view based on a character. For example, around the topic of climate change, roles could include an executive from industry, a green activist, a teenager and an older person. Students can research and write their own scripts to include many different viewpoints. Borrow TV formats that the participants will recognise such as *The X Factor* or *Dragons' Den*.

Socratic seminar

A Socratic seminar is based on the Socratic theory that questioning and exploration of a topic will lead to deeper understanding. Every member of the group is able to participate and make a contribution.

- The whole group is given information on the topic, e.g. a common piece of text, short film or other stimulus.
- The class is divided into two groups. One group form an inner discussion circle and discuss the topic through provocative questions asked and facilitated by the teacher.
- The second group sit outside the discussion circle. It is their job to observe the discussion and peer assess the participants.
- After ten minutes the two circles swap positions and discussion continues with the new inner circle.
- If classroom space is an issue, have the two groups sit side by side instead of in concentric circles.

Games

By incorporating popular games into the classroom you can capitalise on discussion between team members while they play. Games can raise questions and encourage groups or teams to solve problems through discussion. Competitions and prizes are also good for group motivation. Game formats could include *Deal or No Deal*, speed debating, Top Trumps or Cluedo.

Open discussion

An open discussion involving the whole class can be very effective and rewarding. It is a good format for smaller classes who are more experienced at discussion lessons. It is also a useful plenary activity for the end of a lesson.

