



CAROUSEL BRAINSTORMING

"Ideas are information taking shape."

— Jim Rohn

OVERVIEW

Small groups of students rotate around the room, sharing and recording responses to prompts written on posters.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- As a warm-up to activate students' prior knowledge before studying a new topic
- As a follow-up for students to review what they've learned about a topic
- To assess the class overall for knowledge or gaps in understanding about a topic
- To give all students a chance to move and actively participate
- To foster a positive classroom climate by cultivating interaction in small groups

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 1 hour

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- One sheet of poster or flip chart paper per group of 3-5 students, each with a different numbered prompt written at the top (e.g., different questions about a topic to be studied or under review)

- One flip chart marker per group, each a different color

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Work in small groups (3-5 students) to brainstorm ideas in response to different prompts
- Read and reflect on ideas that other groups have recorded
- Communicate their group's ideas by writing them on a shared poster
- Discuss all the responses as a class

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

What are the most important aspects of the topic you have been or are going to be covering? Of these aspects, what prompts/questions might evoke a range of different responses from students?

INSTRUCTIONS

SET-UP

- Before class, divide the class into small groups of 3-5 students each. (Alternatively, you could let students count off or even divide themselves into groups of a certain number at the beginning of the activity.)
- Create one poster per group, each with a different numbered prompt written at the top. (Each group will start at one poster and rotate around the class until they have responded to all the posters.) For instance, if there will be six groups, create six posters labeled 1-6, each with a different prompt. Examples of prompts could include:
- If you are about to begin a new unit, ask students what they know about key concepts or figures from the unit, to draw out existing knowledge and/or preconceptions about them.
- If you have just finished a unit, pose questions about the most important aspects of the unit that you want students to remember, to help them review their knowledge and identify gaps in understanding.

- If your unit of study involves critical thinking or creativity, such as literary analysis or scientific problem-solving, use open-ended prompts that will encourage students to come up with a variety of ideas.
- Place the posters around the classroom, either on the wall or on desks/tables grouped for the activity.

THE PRACTICE

- Once the students are in their groups, direct each group to go to one of the posters (e.g., group 1 goes to poster 1, group 2 to poster 2, etc.).
- Remind students of guidelines for respectful and productive group discussion, such as:
 - “sharing the air” (monitoring your own participation, and stepping up or stepping back as appropriate).
 - engaging critically with ideas rather than criticizing people.
 - working together to reach greater understanding instead of trying to “win” or convince others of your views.
- Give the groups a designated amount of time (3-5 minutes, or shorter/longer as appropriate) to discuss and respond to the prompt on their poster. Ask them to write down their responses on the poster using their flip chart marker (of which each group has a different color, to show responses from various groups).
- Encourage all students to participate within their groups and to help ensure everyone’s ideas are heard.
- You might use a bell or other sound to indicate when the time is over.
- When the designated amount of time has passed, have each group rotate to the next poster (e.g., group 1 moves to poster 2, group 2 moves to poster 3, etc.), and repeat the brainstorming period.
- Encourage groups to read and respond to what other groups have already written, such as with questions, in addition to adding their own responses to the prompt.
- Repeat the rotation until each group has had the chance to discuss and respond to each of the prompts.
- Once all the groups have contributed to all the posters, bring all the posters up to the front of the classroom and lead a whole-class discussion of the prompts and responses.
- You may want to address any consensus or contrast between responses, as well as any ideas that led to questions from other groups.
- If appropriate, work with the class to summarize the main takeaways.

CLOSURE (OPTIONAL)

- Have students reflect individually, such as by writing in a journal, about their experience of this activity. How did the group process reinforce, change, or add to their own ideas? Did any disagreements come up in their group, and if so, how were they managed? Did everyone in their group--including themselves--contribute to the process, and if not, what could they do next time to change that?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Did all students seem engaged in generating and discussing ideas within their groups? If not, how might you encourage students to balance participation within their groups next time? Do you notice a greater sense of connection among students in the class after this activity?

Were students, or you, surprised by any of the ideas that were shared? How will this activity inform your next steps on this topic?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Active learning](#) techniques in general, in which students actively discuss and reflect on ideas rather than passively absorbing them, boost students' engagement and learning. Brainstorming in groups can [enhance](#) students' motivation, confidence, and [creativity](#), especially when groups are able to [build on others'](#) ideas and [reflect afterwards](#) on the ideas generated.

Carousel Brainstorming, in particular, is often used to enable all students to participate, to the benefit of all. For example, it has recently [been shown](#) to improve speaking ability and reduce speaking anxiety in foreign language classes.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who are [more engaged](#) at school overall tend to do better in academics and in life. More specifically, interactive techniques like Carousel Brainstorming promote the kind of critical thinking and communication skills that students will be able to apply across contexts, and that will thus [serve them well](#) in their future educational and career trajectories.