

Inside-Outside Circles

IN BRIEF: Participants have quick, one-on-one exchanges with many people in a short time. Handy for trading tips, short examples, or other information that doesn't require a lengthy discussion.

HOW TO DO IT

- 1 Make sure the room is large enough to allow participants to form two concentric circles** with a comfortable talking space between them.
- 2 Briefly introduce the structure.** For example:

“We’re going to form an inner and an outer circle to exchange ideas about how we might best use the new strategies that our instructional consultant shared with us.”
- 3 Participants count off by twos.** The ones form an inner circle, facing out, and the twos form an outer circle, facing in. Each two should be facing a one, forming a pair.
- 4 State a question for discussion.** (Use questions that can be addressed fairly quickly.) Partners briefly exchange ideas. Allow about 1 minute for this.
- 5 On your signal, the outside circle shifts one spot to the right** to form new pairs. The new partners discuss the same question, or a new question that you pose. Repeat as time allows.
- 6 Bring the whole group back together for a quick debrief.**

VARIATIONS

- Depending on the size of the group and the shape of the meeting space, you can have participants form two sets of inside-outside circles.
- Use Inside-Outside Circles for skills practice. For example, describe a student misbehavior and have partners trade examples of clear, respectful redirecting language they can use to quickly restore positive behavior in that situation.



Learning Structure in Action

Improving Vocabulary Instruction

The literacy coach is facilitating a discussion about how to improve instruction for teaching vocabulary in light of the Common Core standards and their focus on text complexity. Using Inside-Outside Circles to warm teachers up for this bigger discussion, she has pairs briefly discuss the following questions:

- “How do you currently approach vocabulary instruction?”
- “How do you ensure vocabulary is appropriately challenging?”
- “How do you find texts that are appropriately challenging?”

After pairs discuss the first question, the literacy coach rings the signal chime. The outer circle shifts, new pairs discuss the next question, and so on. After 5 minutes, the group completes this Inside-Outside Circle warm-up and moves into their larger discussion.