Think-pair-share

Of all the basic instructional techniques, questioning ranks among the most important tools for facilitating learning. Providing students with sufficient “wait time” (time to think about the question and formulate a response) and ensuring that all students (not just the quickest and brightest students in the class) respond to questions are two critical components of effective use of questioning techniques that are frequently overlooked. Think-pair-share is a procedure that effectively facilitates both of these and it promotes student elaboration of the to-be-learned content subject as well.

To implement Think-pair-share, a question is posed, and then students are given time to reflect on the answer. Only after you give the signal do students turn to a partner and share their response to the question with them. Afterward, a few pairs are asked to share their response with the class as a whole and discussion ensues.

Teaching Tips

Step 1: Reflect on your content and identify specific question(s) to pose during the Think-pair-share activity.

Opened-ended questions that require explanations for answers (as opposed to one-word responses) are best for Think-pair-share activities. A wide variety of open-ended questions can be used. Some samples are provided below.

What? So what? Now what? questions...
example...
What was the most important thing you learned about this?
So what? Why do you think its so important?
Now what? What will you do with what you learned?
example...
What was an idea from this lesson that you’d like to “trash”?
So what? Why do you think it should be trashed?
Now what? What can you do to promote trashing of this idea?

Metaphorical questions...
example...
The core idea of today’s lesson was about how, during the Spanish Inquisition, people that the Roman Catholic Church considered “heretics” were summarily executed or otherwise severely punished. What would be a good metaphor for how people were treated? ...In what forms does this idea show up in today’s world?
example...
We’ve been examining how the first printing press and its first product, the Gothenburg Bible, impacted history. What would be something that’s happening right now that historians a thousand years from now might say had a profound impact on our current society? Why or in what way?

example...
The core idea of today’s lesson about the Progressive Era has been about how muckrakers made citizens aware of the social problems of the day -- especially the abuses of core businesses and government. Although we don’t call them muckrakers now, in what forms do we have similar things happening today?

Application questions...
example...
The core idea of today’s lesson has been about how muckrakers made citizens aware of the social problems of the day -- especially the abuses of core businesses and government. How could we apply this idea today to improve things?

Extrapolation questions...
example...
What if?... What if there had never been a ‘Martin Luther King, Jr.’? How would things be different today?

example...
Given LBJs approach to overseeing the Viet Nam war, what should have been done differently that would have produced a better result? Why do you think so?

Forecasting future learning questions...
example...
So, far, we’ve been learning about the Lincoln Douglas debates. Based on what you learned today, what do you think happened next? What do you think we’ll be learning about next?

Step 2: Teach the content.

Step 3: Pose the question & structure think-time
a. Have students identify partners.

b. Inform students that they are to think of an answer to the question that you are about to pose, but not say anything out loud until you give a signal.
c. Pose the question, and then provide about 1 minute of think-time.

Step 4: Cue students to share their responses with their partner.

Step 5: Call on two different students (each from a different pair) to share their responses with the class; facilitate class discussion around similarities or difference in opinions that various pairs generated.