



TI-AIE

## Pair work for language and literacy

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## What this unit is about

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This unit focuses on ways of planning and managing pair work in your language lessons. By providing opportunities for sociable, collaborative learning in many different activity types, pair work can be a very effective tool in your teaching repertoire.

## What you can learn in this unit

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- How to plan for and manage pair work in your language lessons.
- How to extend your repertoire of classroom management techniques.
- How to use pair work as an opportunity to assess your students' language and literacy development.

## Why this approach is important

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In everyday situations, people work alongside one another, speaking and listening, watching, supporting, suggesting, and assisting. Such forms of collaboration encourage the exchange of ideas and open the door to different ways of doing things. If everything is centred on the teacher in the classroom, there will be very few opportunities for students to explore, discuss, question, experiment and learn in natural, mutually beneficial ways. Using pair work is a very effective way of incorporating talk-based learning opportunities of this kind into your language lessons.

Pair work is suitable for all ages and all subjects. Because it enables many students to talk at the same time, it is particularly effective with large classes. It is highly inclusive in that it requires all students to communicate. It is especially useful in multilingual, multi-grade classes, as pairings can be organised flexibly and supportively in line with your students' needs. Whether you combine students according to similar attainment levels, different attainment levels, the same home language friendships, or allocate them randomly, varying your approach to pairing can have the effect of stimulating learning while enhancing classroom relationships.

## 1 Why should you use pair work?

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Activity 1 encourages you to reflect on using pair work in your language lessons.

### Activity 1: Reflecting on using pair work in the classroom

With a colleague, if possible, start by reading Resource 1, 'Using pair work'. Underline what you consider to be the key learning points of the text for you as a teacher.

Think of one or two lessons that you have taught recently. These might focus on language or on a specific subject area.

- Were there opportunities for pair work? If so, what were they?
- Did you use these them to get your students to work in pairs? If so, how successful were they?
- If you are new to pair work, what concerns do you have about implementing it as a regular practice in your classroom?



[Video: Using pair work](#)

## 2 Examples of lessons with pair work

In this first case study you will read about a teacher who employed pair work in a poetry writing activity.

### Case Study 1: Using pair work in a poetry class

*Mr Acharya works in a small school outside Gorakhpur. His Class VIII students' writing abilities span very differing levels. Here he describes how he used pair work to support their poetry writing.*

My students had been reading aloud some contemporary poems by Arun Kolatkar and Amit Chaudhuri. They had already written some poems on their own. This time I decided to get them to do so in pairs.

I chose a topic that I thought they could identify with: arguments with friends. I introduced the topic by asking the whole class some questions. These included:

- 'When was your last disagreement with a friend?'
- 'Was it a minor argument or a big one?'
- 'How did you feel about it?'
- 'Was the disagreement resolved?'
- 'If so, how did that happen? How long did it take?'
- 'If not, do you still expect it to be resolved?'
- 'Is your friendship the same now as before?'

The topic generated a lot of discussion, with many students contributing to it. I wrote some of the words and phrases they used on the board, so they could draw on these in their writing.

Next, I told them that they were going to work in pairs and write a poem called 'The Argument'. I organised the pairs by asking my students to work with the person next to them. I explained that they should take turns to make up a line of the poem at a time, noting it down as they went. After 30 minutes, I asked a volunteer from each pair to read out their completed – or partially completed – poem.

Here is a poem that one of the pairs wrote:

### 'The Argument'

I had an argument with my friend Amvi  
We were near a temple when she said something to an old man  
He was poor and dirty  
But my friend was unkind to him  
I said she was wrong to say what she did  
She said she didn't care  
I felt sorry for the man  
I walked away alone

The poems that my students produced were about situations and feelings that they had experience and an understanding of. The pair talk helped them to share their ideas and consider how to capture them in writing.

When I use pair work, I keep the activities quite short, so that my students are less concerned with whom they have been placed with and more focused on completing the task within the allocated time. I notice, however, that they have quickly become used to working in this way.

