



## Participatory Response Options to Engage Students

**What to do:** Read through the 12 participatory response options provided below. Select one that seems like a good fit for an upcoming activity and try it! Then select another one to try. If one works especially well, think of ways to make it part of other program activities or routines.

**Why it matters:** Participatory response options give all students a chance to participate, not just those who answer first or talk the loudest. Taking the “me, me, me!” out of the equation gets every student’s neurons firing, helps them feel seen and heard, and promotes a sense of connection and belonging.

### 1. Electronic Responses

Try letting students share their thoughts, ask questions, or give an opinion by using a content-sharing platform like Padlet or Google Docs, or a text messaging tool like Poll Everywhere. It’s fast and easy, and in some cases can be anonymous.



### 2. Thumbs-Up/Thumbs-Down

A fun way for students to give a yes or no response.

### 3. Response Cards

Similar to thumbs-up/thumbs-down, but this option uses index cards. Students can write their own responses to hold up, or the facilitator can prepare response cards.

### 4. Think-Pair-Share

Pose a problem, give students time to *think* about it individually, then have them work in *pairs* to solve the problem and *share* their ideas with the class.

### 5. Say Something (also called Turn and Talk)

In pairs, students silently read a passage, watch a short video together, or look at an image. Then the students “say something” to their partner about what it means to them, what questions it raises, or in what ways they agree or disagree with the central message. Partners are encouraged to ask follow-up questions like “What led you to that conclusion?” The activity leader may then invite whole-group sharing, using prompts like “What did you hear your partner say?” and “Do you agree? Why or why not?”

### 6. Say-It-in-a-Word

Somebody tells a story or gives an idea. Each student listens carefully and thinks of a word that sums it up. Then everybody types, writes, or says their word.



## 7. People Graph

Students “take a stand” on a statement by taking time to reflect, then walking to a line or continuum that stretches from one spot in the room to another, with one end labeled “Strongly Agree” and the other end labeled “Strongly Disagree.” Students then group with three or four others standing nearby to share why they took a certain position. The various groups share their reasoning with the larger group, and students once again “take a stand.” They might stay where they are on the continuum or choose a different spot, based on what they’ve heard.

## 8. Tug of War

This is a great activity for yes/no or either/or responses — or for choosing one scenario over another. Depending on group size, you might use poster board or chart paper to draw an image of a tug-of-war rope. Write one choice at one end and the other choice at the opposite end. Next, have students write their names under their selection. Having names on sticky notes works well if you’ll be doing multiple rounds to get to a final response. Feeling adventurous? Here’s another option: Two staff members can hold an actual rope and get the students up and moving to make their choices through *real* tug of war.

## 9. Stoplight

This is great when you need to reach a consensus. Create a large image of a stoplight and give each student three sticky dots — one green, one yellow, and one red. Based on the question or situation posed, have the students write their initials on the color that matches their response — green for yes, yellow for maybe or unsure, and red for no. Have students post their responses on the stoplight, then ask them to explain why they chose the response they did.

## 10. Peer-Generated Questions

Having students come up with questions gets them engaged in several ways. First, they’re reflecting on the academic content to enhance their own learning. Second, they’re engaging in the process by suggesting a question. Third, they’ll be more engaged while they’re listening for their question to be read.

## 11. Round Robin Q&A

This is a small-group option for answering questions. It works best with four students. Each student has a role, which changes after each question. These roles are reader, interpreter, recorder, and reporter. The reader reads the question, the interpreter restates the question in their own words, the recorder writes the group’s response, and the reporter reads the response to the rest of the class. If Student 1 was the reader for Question 1, that student becomes the interpreter for Question 2, and so on.



## 12. Gallery Walk

A gallery walk gets students up and moving to engage with content and with one another. Try these variations:

- **Corners:** You can adapt this activity in a variety of ways. The general idea is this: Each classroom corner represents a different answer (or view, theory, or level of comfort or understanding). Each student goes to the corner that best represents their thinking, but students can move from corner to corner to adjust their answer or opinion as they listen to discussion points. Program staff may facilitate the discussion and encourage students to build on one another's comments.
- **Station to Station:** Students individually work their way around the room as they answer posted questions. The questions may be written on chart paper, for example, and students may write their answers directly on the paper or on sticky notes. Students are encouraged to interact with the original question and with the responses posted by peers. This can also be done in small groups.
- **Chalk Talk:** Do this on the board or at stations posted around the room. This variation is terrific for doing a deep dive into a concept to consider what the concept *is* and *is not*. Students can write thoughts, words, phrases, and definitions, and should be encouraged to draw pictures and symbols. This process also gives students who are reluctant to share verbally a more comfortable chance to engage.
- **Computer Tour:** Students may be very comfortable working with technology, but that can be isolating. Every now and then, stop individual work and have everyone cruise the room. Inspiration can be gained by seeing other students' approaches to solving a problem, creating a work of art, or doing an assignment. Make sure this variation is understood at the beginning so that students feel safe about what they're sharing.



*I shall participate, I shall contribute, and in doing so,  
I shall be the gainer. — Walter Annenberg*

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