

Buzz groups, pairs, and triads

How?

Buzz groups are simply groups of two or three students formed impromptu to discuss a topic for a short period. You can use them in a range of settings, as shown in the following examples.

At the start of a session or class segment:

“To start off, let’s get into buzz groups for five minutes to find out your initial reactions to the readings I set for this week’s class. Off you go.”

When a difficult topic or awkward moment have brought the class to a standstill:

“Well, that seems to have stopped us in our tracks. Let’s try to tackle that in buzz groups for a few minutes and then come back to the whole group and try again once we’ve thought it through a bit more.”

Note that **triads** (threes) **are often more disciplined than pairs**, because it is harder to get off topic as a threesome – usually one person acts as a conscience and brings people back to the task. Pairs may give up more quickly. (“I don’t really understand this.” / “No, it’s difficult, isn’t it?” / “What did you do last night?”)

Triads also appear more resourceful and rigorous, perhaps because at any given time, one of the three is neither speaking nor being directly spoken to, and can have an eye on the question or the task the group is meant to work on. Triads stay on task longer.

When?

- At the start of class.
- During a lull in class or when encountering an area of difficulty.
- Towards the end of a class if you want the feedback from the groups to shape the next class session.

Why?

- Once students have spoken “in private” as a buzz group, it makes them more likely to speak afterwards “in public” among the whole group.
- Buzz groups give students chance to check out their ideas in private before “taking the risk” of speaking publicly.
- They are very useful to get things going in a class and they build energy in the room.

Source: Gibbs, G. (1995). *Discussion with more students*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Centre for Staff Development.