

Ideas: Ways to divide the class

Make a set(s) of cards that have either pictures or words on them. If you want to arrange students into pairs, you'll need two copies of each picture or word. Give each student a card, and then tell them that they have to find the other person in the room with the same card. Likewise, if you want to arrange the students into groups of four, make sure there are four cards that have the same picture on them. Ideally, the words or pictures will be thematically linked to the lesson.

If you do not have time to make cards, you can simply go around the class assigning a word to each student. For example, if you are teaching animal vocabulary and you would like the class divided into three groups, go around the class and say 'cat' to the first student, 'dog' to the second student, and 'horse' to the third student, and repeat until every student has been assigned a word. Then ask everyone to stand up and find the other people in their group. If your students tend to mingle aimlessly without finding their group, you could give more precise instructions. For example, you could say that all the 'cats' meet at the back of the room, all the 'dogs' at the front of the room, and all the 'horses' in the middle of the room.

Ask the students to stand in a line in a particular order, for example, in order of when they were born. If you have been teaching months of the year, you could teach the questions, "When is your birthday?" Then have the students ask each other when their birthdays are and arrange themselves into an order of whose birthday is first to whose birthday is last. When they have arranged themselves, you can easily divide the class into groups of any size. For example, if you want the class divided into groups of 4, simply ask the first four to go sit in a group, then the next four, then the next, and so on. This activity divides the class into groups and also allows the practice of the target language. Of course the line method does not have to be thematically linked to the lesson. You could ask students to arrange themselves in order of their height, hair length, number of pets, number of cousins, etc.

If you want students to change partners without the chaos of the whole class getting up and mingling, go around the class and tell each student that they are either A or B. Then ask all the As to stand up and move one place to the left. You can keep this going throughout the class. Each time that you want the students to change partners, simply ask the As to move one more place to the left.

With a little forward thinking, you can arrange your students into the combinations that you want them to work in, i.e. separating disruptive students, pairing up a weak student with a stronger one. Using some of the methods outlined above, you can make students think that they have been paired up randomly rather than being 'picked on' or 'singled out' by the teacher.