

Group Progress Charts for Young Learners

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LEVEL: Beginner (young learners) and above

TIME REQUIRED: Variable (group roles can be introduced over several classes; tasks for the progress chart can be completed in a single class period or during parts of multiple class periods)

GOALS: To use progress charts to increase learners' participation and offer instructors opportunities to monitor learners' mastery of target material; to engage learners in collaborative work in order to reach group goals; to allow learners to fill different roles in completing group tasks; to raise learners' motivation

MATERIALS: A poster board or large sheet of paper for each progress chart; markers to draw charts (optional: materials to make team/group cards; pictures or symbols to place on team-progress stickers; labels to identify group members' roles)

BACKGROUND:

During the first week of teaching practicum, my class of prospective teachers was concerned about their inability to get the attention of students. As practicing novice teachers, they said that this lack of attention led to frustration. This article illustrates how using a "progress chart" can create a classroom filled with enthusiasm and attention, where students complete given tasks together.

One of the toughest challenges novice teachers face is getting the maximum participation of students, especially in classes with mixed ability in terms of language proficiency. When these students work in groups, the less-advanced students seem uninterested in doing the assigned task, while more-advanced students complete it. Consequently, many students become inattentive and are unlikely to achieve the learning targets of the lesson.

Prior to the progress chart: roles and tasks

One practical way to resolve this issue is to assign different roles to all the members of a group. In addition to the traditional roles of leader, writer, and presenter, new roles can create a fun learning atmosphere. As the teacher, you can create roles in association with the concept of the lesson. For example, if the lesson is on "Let's Protect Our Environment," the new roles can be head of the department, media secretary, field officers, and researchers.

You can simulate any situation and adapt the roles, which might be positions involved in a meeting, office, or educational institute. You also need to assign tasks that involve all these roles.

As an option, in addition to traditional roles, there can be a "spy," who may also be called the reporter or secret sharer. After initial group discussion on the given task, the spy

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in one group can cross over to other groups, then meet up and communicate with the rest of the spies about the tasks. They share information on any doubts their groups have, clarify instructions, and return to their groups, who, in the meantime, have started working on the simpler tasks.

For example, the students remaining in the groups might start basic tasks such as filling in the blanks, answering true/false questions, or scanning for information, while the spies make sure they understand subsequent tasks that involve deeper comprehension and critical thinking.

To recognize the specific role of each student, you can prepare labels or badges on sticker paper—or give blank labels or sticker paper to the groups (of students) to write their roles themselves.

The purposes of this division of roles are manifold:

- All the members of the group are involved in tasks.
- It encourages collaboration among the group members.
- Students must accept their own accountability toward completing each task.
- Group collaboration is maintained even during the use of the progress chart (see below).

Introduction to the progress chart

You can implement the use of roles over a few classes until the group dynamics become clear and students have had a chance to serve in different roles. This sets the background

for introducing the progress chart. You should highlight the importance of maximum participation by all group members in the tasks assigned, though their performance is measured using the progress chart.

The progress chart ignites a competitive (in a friendly way) and productive classroom environment. Make sure certain students are not able to dominate the group work and complete the tasks by themselves, just to be the “winners.” This should be done by setting class rules to establish a classroom environment that promotes healthy competition and teamwork, and by giving clear instructions about collaborating before the use of the progress chart.

Emphasize that the goal is not to “win”; the idea is for group members to work together, for everyone to contribute, and for all class members to finish with a strong understanding of the material.

PREPARATION:

You will need to prepare at least one progress chart to show to the class and to use during the activity.

Basic progress charts have a column for each group, with the column divided into levels, or steps. The idea is that each group will have a symbol or picture that is taped to the chart in that group’s column. The symbol is moved to a higher level each time the group completes a task successfully, until they reach the goal, or the top of the column. You might make each step worth points (10, 20, 30, etc.).

Themed progress charts take more time to prepare but are more interesting for students, especially young learners. The groups might be named after characters in a specific movie

or book, and other age-appropriate themes are possible (colors, sports, cars, etc.).

For example, if your learners are familiar with the movie *Frozen*, the progress chart can be based on a quest to rescue Elsa, the character who runs away. Each time a group completes a task successfully, they move one step closer to rescuing her. The setup might be as follows:

Goal/target: Bringing Elsa Home

- First step: Crossing the river
- Second step: Escaping from the wolves
- Third step: Climbing the mountain
- Fourth step: Seeing Elsa
- Final step: Bringing Elsa home

Preparing the chart

- Prepare the chart with a column for each group. Use transparent sticky tape to locally laminate the area along each column of the chart.
- At the bottom of the chart, for each column, indicate the character or group name by using a symbol for each group (e.g., you can use the faces of the characters or pictures of cars). Place a piece of double-sided tape on the back of the laminated face of the symbol in order to move it along the chart as the group completes tasks. As an option, instead of having teams move *up columns*, you can move their symbols *across rows* as they complete tasks.

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the idea of the progress chart to the whole class. Tell the class that they will work toward reaching a goal *as a group*.
2. Describe the activity and give instructions: You will divide the class into groups, and each group will have a task

to complete. All students in the group must contribute in order for the group to complete the task. When the group completes the task successfully, they will advance on the progress chart as they try to reach the goal.

3. Decide on the number of groups, according to the number of students in the class. Groups of four generally work well. Divide the class into groups. If the theme of the progress chart is *Frozen*, you might name groups after characters in the movie: for example, Anna, Olaf, Sven, and Prince Hans.
4. Within each group, students have designated roles: leader, writer, presenter, reporter, etc. Students should be familiar with these roles after having had previous experience with this kind of shared group work.
5. If possible, give each group a card with a picture of the group's character (see Figure 1).
6. Display the progress chart on the wall or blackboard, where all groups can see it. Tell students that if their group completes a task successfully by working together, they will move one step closer to completing the quest: for example, saving Elsa and bringing her home, getting their car to the finish line (Figure 2), or having their butterfly reach the flower garden (Figure 3).
7. Let groups know how much time they will have. Use your knowledge of your students' ability to determine how much time they are likely to need. You might want to keep the quest going for more than one class period, as students will come to the next class eager to continue the quest.
8. Pass out or explain the first task and have groups begin working. Monitor group work, making sure students are on task and everyone is contributing.

9. When time is up, have groups present their answers. Depending on the task and your preferences, this can be done orally as a class, or groups can submit their answers for you to check, or groups can exchange answers to be checked by peer groups.
10. On the progress chart, indicate the tasks each group has completed. You can move each group's symbol to show their progress.
11. You can finish the quest in a day, or you can stop at a certain stage and continue in the next class.

VARIATIONS

Group cards can reinforce a group's identity, especially with young learners. If materials are available, you can make group cards that can be reused:

- Use colored A4 boards for preparing the 3D prisms.
- Follow the illustrations in Figure 1, steps (a) through (h), to fold the board. If you have a picture, you can paste it on top of the folded prism, as shown in step (i).
- Place the group card in the middle of each group's table or meeting place to identify the groups easily.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TASKS

The types of tasks can vary widely, according to your students' level and the content of the lesson or unit. Basic tasks can involve

spelling, spelling completion (i.e., students finish spelling given words with some letters missing), sentence completion, unscrambling sentences, and the like.

More-advanced tasks are for groups to read a passage (or look at a picture, watch a video clip, etc.), then answer questions that proceed from fact-based, short-answer, or multiple-choice questions to questions that require analysis, further thought, and explanation.

For ideas on how to involve multiple students and add movement to tasks, see, for example, "Read and Run" (Warfield 2019), "Skim, Scan, and Run" (McCaughey 2018), and "Running for Your Words!" (Büchel 2015).

FINAL REMARKS

Through the use of the progress chart, learning becomes an involuntary task. Students are using the target language skills of the lesson as they complete each step, and young learners in particular derive instant gratification through the rewards gained by task completion. Meanwhile, the class as a whole achieves the learning outcomes of the lesson, while the teacher monitors student progress throughout.

Use the progress chart to maximize student participation. It can also be a tool to indicate students' ongoing learning achievements. Themed progress charts in particular can increase motivation among all learners. During my students' practice-teaching time, their learners eagerly waited for the practice teachers' arrival, as they wanted to reach the next level of the progress chart and to know

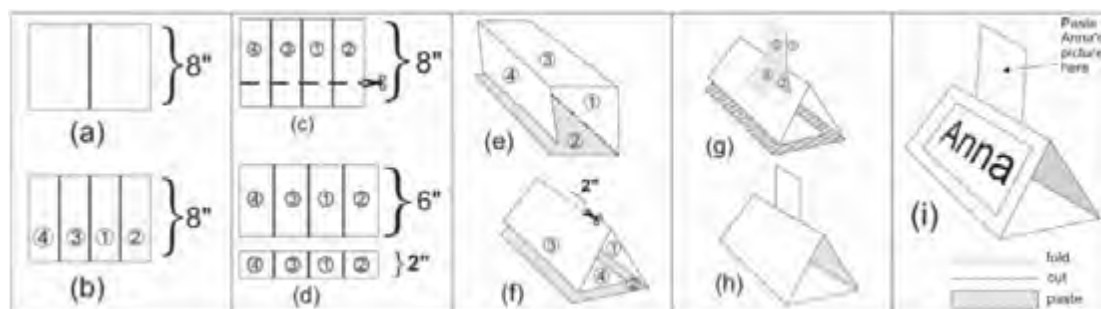


Figure 1. Instructions for making group cards



	START	1 ST	2 ND	3 RD	4 TH	FINISH
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						

Figure 2. In this progress chart, group cars can “race” toward the finish—but the goal should be for all groups to “win” by completing the tasks, demonstrating teamwork and understanding of the lesson. In this case, the cars are cutouts that are stuck to the chart and can be moved toward the Finish column as groups complete their tasks.







<div> <div>progress chart</div>  </div>						
100						
90						
80						
70						
60						
50						
40						
30						
20						
10						
Groups						

Figure 3. With progress charts, many themes are possible. In this example, groups are represented by butterflies, which climb up the chart toward the flower garden as groups complete their tasks.

who would save a video-game character or reach Elsa’s castle.

Finally, please keep these pointers in mind:

- Groups need to complete the learning tasks step-by-step; that will carry them to the target.
- You can use the progress chart to assess group performance, individual contributions, collaboration, and language strengths and areas for improvement.
- Using the progress chart over a few days or a week is advantageous if the lesson or unit has multiple sections; you might use the chart to help students review each day’s lesson or the cumulative unit.
- For larger classes, you can use more than one progress chart.
- If a group is falling behind on the chart while making sufficient effort, you can assign a less complex task. It’s also possible to provide different groups with tasks that vary in degree of complexity. Although the chart can be used competitively, a more valuable way to use it is as motivation for each group to achieve the overall goal.
- For a new unit or lesson, you can use a new progress chart with a different theme and with newly formed groups.

REFERENCES

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- Warfield, S. 2019. Read and run: A communicative reading activity. *English Teaching Forum* 57 (2): 31–34.

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