

## MAKING THE MOST OF LARGE CLASSES BY USING LEARNING TEAMS

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Enrollment in English language courses is often high for many reasons. Studying English is compulsory in many parts of the world, but some students make a personal choice to take classes as well. Whether students are fulfilling a requirement or want to study English to meet a specific goal, the popularity of the language has filled some classrooms to capacity or beyond.

Large class sizes can make teaching a challenge. This week in the Teacher's Corner, we will examine how to make the most of a large class by using learning teams and assigning tasks that require students to apply what they have learned.

### LEARNING TEAMS

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One challenge of having a large class is ensuring that all students are engaged and participate in the lesson and activities. Whether we have 25, 55, or 95 students, it is hard to deliver instruction and circulate around the classroom to be sure every student is being attentive and understands the content.

One way to increase student participation is to organize learning teams with specific roles for each student. Smaller teams provide more opportunities for students to participate and keep each other focused. The ideal number for a team is between 4 and 6 students. Many teachers choose to keep the same teams for a designated period of time such as a month, a marking period, or a semester. How frequently you create new learning teams depends on the needs of your class.

It is imperative that you thoroughly explain the purpose of learning teams and the responsibilities of each role to students. It is important to provide opportunities for the class to practice working in teams and fulfilling each of the roles. If you invest time in communicating expectations and practicing procedures, the process will become effortless and students will easily be able to change roles and teams as needed. The roles are described below and can be adjusted depending on how many students are in each group.

### TEAM MEMBER ROLES

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**Moderator:** This member is responsible for guiding the group's discussion. This includes making sure that all members of the team are focused on the topic and being sure that all members participate. The moderator must ensure that each team member has a chance to contribute his/her ideas to the

discussion or task. If needed, this can be accomplished by allowing each member to talk individually for a set amount of time.

**Timekeeper:** The timekeeper ensures that the team adheres to time constraints. If needed, the timekeeper can divide the total time allotted to the team into sections, such as time for discussion, time for summarizing, and time for completing the final product. He/She can also work closely with the moderator to keep track of time so that each team member is able to share ideas.

**Supply Manager:** The supply manager's job is to determine what supplies are needed for the team to complete the assigned task. This person also gathers the supplies, or divides responsibility for bringing supplies amongst the team's members. The supply manager also ensures that the supplies are returned and everything is cleaned up properly at the end of the team's work time.

**Recorder:** The recorder is responsible for taking notes on the team's discussion and ideas. Before the team creates a final product, the summarizer (see below) will work with the team to synthesize the information. Then, the recorder will write ideas or information for the team's final product.

**Summarizer:** After each team member has had a chance to contribute ideas, the summarizer will provide an overview of what the team discussed. The summarizer can use the recorder's notes and extract any common themes or information. The summarizer should present an overview to the team and help members reach an agreement about what to include in the final product.

**Reporter:** The reporter's job is to present the team's final product and answer any questions from the audience. Depending on the task that is assigned, this may be an oral presentation, a poster, or another type of project. The reporter is the "voice" of the team and represents everyone's ideas in a presentation to others.

Note: If your learning teams have 4 or 5 members, some of the roles can be combined. For instance, the moderator can easily act as timekeeper, and the supply manager can also be the summarizer.

### SUGGESTED TASKS FOR LEARNING TEAMS

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For students to benefit from working in teams, it is important that they are assigned a task which requires each member to contribute and play an active role in creating a product that demonstrates their learning.

For this reason, activities like worksheets or textbook exercises are not the best to use with learning teams. Students in learning teams will benefit most from completing tasks such as the ones suggested below.

**Poster:** Have students create a poster summarizing a lesson or unit. For example, after teaching a specific verb tense, ask students to describe when the tense is used, describe the morphology, and provide example sentences with illustrations. After teaching new vocabulary words, students can make a poster with definitions, illustrations, and sentences containing each of the words. These can be displayed in your classroom for students to refer to throughout the course.

**Story/Composition:** Ask each learning team to write a story, short text, or sample dialogue to demonstrate their learning. Require students to include specific parts of speech, vocabulary, tenses, or language structures that you taught in the lesson.

**Skit:** Learning teams can write and perform short skits to demonstrate their understanding of concepts that you taught. For example, after students learn about adjectives, ask them to create a skit that requires them to describe something. Students can also demonstrate their knowledge of new words or grammatical concepts by creating a script that requires them to use specific vocabulary, tenses, or language structures specific to a certain topic about which they are learning.

**Lesson Reflection:** Have a set of about 5 questions prepared for learning teams to answer after your lesson. Questions that require students to apply their learning work best. Example questions are outlined in the table below.

Use with new verb tenses, vocabulary, or grammar concepts:	Use with literature to reflect on characters and events:	Use with nonfiction texts:
<p>Describe a situation in which you might use the _____ tense.</p> <p>Describe how a word changes when it is in the _____ tense. Describe how a word changes when it is an adjective, ordinal number, possessive, etc.</p> <p>List 5 examples of words in the _____ tense. List 5 examples of words that are adjectives, related to a certain topic, etc. Note: The number of words you require can be adjusted to the specific needs of your students.</p>	<p>After reading this part of the story, how would you feel if you were _____? Why?</p> <p>Would you take the same actions as _____? Why or why not?</p> <p>What do you think will happen in the next chapter/section of the story? Why?</p> <p>Create a timeline of important events in this chapter/section of the story. (This can be an ongoing task after reading each assigned section of a text.)</p>	<p>What is the main idea of this text?</p> <p>Name two interesting facts that you learned from reading this text.</p> <p>Do you interact with this topic in your life? How often? How does it affect you? Can you think of people who would find this topic interesting or important?</p> <p>Was this text trying to inform, persuade, instruct, or entertain? Why do you think so?</p>

<p>Write 5 sentences that show you understand how to use _____ tense, the new vocabulary, or the new grammatical concept. Note: The number of sentences you require can be adjusted to the specific needs of your students.</p> <p>How would you explain this tense/vocabulary/grammatical concept to someone else so that they would be able to use it correctly?</p>	<p>Which event in the story do you think has been the most important so far? Why?</p>	<p>If you had to give someone else a summary of the key points from this text, what would you tell them?</p>
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**Dictogloss:** To complete a dictogloss activity with students, you should select a passage or short text you would like to use. The text can be fiction or nonfiction. Select about 10 words from the passage that you want to emphasize. The steps for this strategy are:

1. Read the text out loud to the whole class. Ask students to listen closely.
2. Inform students that you will read the text out loud again. This time, students may take notes, draw pictures, or write down anything that helps them remember the events or concepts from the text.
3. Write the list of vocabulary you selected on the board. Have a student read it aloud, or have students repeat the words.
4. Tell students that they must work with their learning team to recreate the text. Inform teams that they must include all of the words from the list.
5. Allow teams to assemble and compare notes in order to recreate the text.
6. After the allotted time has passed, have teams present their recreated text to other teams or the whole class. Students can provide feedback if vocabulary or important details are missing from the teams' recreated texts.

**Other Projects:** Learning teams can also create other types of projects to demonstrate what they have learned. Depending on the topic, you can ask students to create a grammar book, print advertisement, poem, commercial, song, diorama, or visual representation.

The tasks described above can be presented in several ways. Some assignments can simply be turned in and evaluated by the teacher. Others can be performed or presented to the whole class or another learning team. Learning teams, or the whole class, can assess the projects based on a rubric or checklist.

For assessment tools and ideas, see the October Teacher's Corner, [Collecting and Using Data](#). A benefit of team-based assignments and peer assessment strategies is that it can help reduce the amount of time teachers spend evaluating students' work. This can be especially helpful with large classes.

Learning teams can be an excellent way to address a large class. Because students are required to participate in a team-based activity at the end of the lesson, they are more likely to be engaged when you provide instruction. Clearly defined roles and accountability to peers help students stay focused within the team.

Additionally, the performance-based tasks suggested above require students to do more than just recite information. Instead, they must use higher order thinking skills to apply their learning in order to create a final product. Reviewing concepts by discussing and creating something helps learners form new ideas and retain information better than many lower-level individual tasks.