

Thumbs Up

Source: Michael Rohd

Number of Players: 5+

Space: Room for a circle or a large U-shape

Materials: None

What is it & why use it?

The purpose of this strategy is to help participants consider how they juggle multiple objectives at the same time. This allows the participants to tackle and make visible the challenges of problem solving through a simple activity. It also serves to energize and focus a group at the beginning of a lesson.

Directions:

The facilitator invites group to sit or stand in a circle. The facilitator asks participants to create the “thumbs up” sign with their right hand and hold their left palm open, facing upwards slightly in front of the person to their left. Participants are instructed to place their right thumbs facing down in the person’s palm standing to their right. The thumb should just graze the open palm of the other person. The facilitator will count to three and then say GO. Simultaneously participants will try to grab the thumb that’s placed in their left palm, and get their thumb away from the person on their right. Play a few rounds. After each round ask how it went. Next switch hands so the left thumb is down and the right thumb is up. Try the process a few times with the new configuration.

Reflection:

- *How did it go? What did you notice about yourself in this activity?*
- *What strategies did you use to be successful?*
- *What does this activity have to do with our preparation for our work together today?*

Make the Connection:
Use this strategy to explore executive function, multiple tasks, the brain, choices, and/or strategy.

Possible Side-Coaching:

- *Focus on your objectives.*
- *How does it feel to work for two different objectives at the same time?*
- *How can you improve your skills at playing the game?*

Possible Variations/Applications:

- Have one of the participants count for the group: 3-2-1...GO.
- Play with anticipation by counting extremely slowly, or pausing after counting to two and observe how many participants go early. Use this as a metaphor to talk about listening to others.
- Use to prepare a group for a collaborative project or task with multiple objectives.

Poster Dialogue

Source: Unknown

Number of Players: 3+

Space: Wall or floor space for posters

Materials: Individual space to write (paper or board), markers for participants, music (if desired)

What is it & why use it?

Poster Dialogue asks participants to use words, images/symbols to respond individually and reflect collectively to a series of open-ended prompts. The prompts invite participants to make personal connections between the topics to be explored and their lived experience. The facilitator uses this strategy to assess participant knowledge and opinion.

Directions:

Prior to the activity, the facilitator writes open-ended statements/questions at the top of a poster-sized piece of paper or spread out on a whiteboard/chalk board – one statement/question per page or area of the board. The facilitator provides each participant a marker and explains that in this silent activity, participants can respond to each question/statement in any order. The facilitator may or may not choose to participate in the activity as well. After participants have put a comment on each prompt, they are encouraged to take time to read what the other participants have written. The strategy concludes with the facilitator bringing the full group back together to analyze and synthesize the responses and to make connections to a larger inquiry. If the group is large, the facilitator may choose to read aloud many or all of the statements on each page – since it can be hard to read writing on posters from a distance – and then ask the group to synthesize meaning from what they heard. It is useful to make meaning with individual posters before making meaning across posters that look at the same idea from different points of view.

Reflection:

Individual pages:

- *Which words/responses got the most check marks on the page or did you hear the most as I read what was written out loud?*
- *What does this group value or think is most important in relationship to this topic?*

Comparing pages:

- *Are there specific words/phrases that appear on multiple pages? Why do you think this happened?*
- *What do these ideas have to do with each other or our larger inquiry?*

Possible Side-Coaching:

- *Make sure you put a response to each prompt/question.*
- *If someone has written exactly what you wanted to say, you are welcome to put a check mark by that statement.*

Possible Variations/Applications:

- After everyone has written one comment, invite participants to write brief responses to other people's comments or draw connections between comments.
- Use the same set of prompts multiple times across a unit of inquiry so that the facilitator and participants can document and assess shifts in knowledge and understanding over time.
- Groups of 5-10 can start with one poster prompt to work on as a group; then, posters can be passed simultaneously until each group has added their comments to the prompt.

Vote from Your Seat

Source: Unknown

Number of Players: Any

Space: Can be done in chairs or seated at desks

Materials Needed: None

What is it & why use it?

Vote from Your Seat is a strategy in which seated participants use their arms or bodies to show their answer (up = I agree; down = I disagree) to a prompt or question. This active strategy provides a quick snapshot of participant opinion to the group and the facilitator to generate dialogue.

Directions:

Before the activity, the facilitator creates a series of statements on a topic that will evoke an opinion from participants (e.g., *Learning is easy*). The facilitator explains that in this activity the group will be asked to listen to each statement, twice, and after the second time decide whether they “agree” or “disagree” with what is being said. Participants will then silently show their vote using their arms. The facilitator models “strongly agree” by putting her/his hands high in the air and arms straight up and “strongly disagree” by putting his/her hands to her/his side and arms straight down. The facilitator explains that participants can choose to vote anywhere between “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” by putting their hands in a sliding continuum between up in the air “agree” and down at the side “disagree.” The facilitator then reads the first prompt twice, the second time asking participants to vote from their seat. Once the group has voted, they are invited to keep their hands still and scan the room to see other responses, and then to put his/her hands down. When desired, after any statement, the facilitator can lead a dialogue with the group to reflect on the full group response; reflect in pairs on individual responses; or, reflect from different ends of the response continuum on the ideas being explored (an “agree” and a “disagree”).

Reflection:

- *In general, what did you notice about the responses in the room? When did we most agree? When did we disagree?*
- *What did we learn about the group from this activity?*
- *How might these statements make us think differently or understand more about our larger inquiry?*

Possible Side-Coaching:

- *When you vote, please be sure that your hands clearly display your opinion.*
- *Remember, this is about your opinion only. There is no right or wrong to this activity.*
- *This activity is about listening, and understanding a new point of view.*
- *Turn to a neighbor and discuss why you voted the way you did.*

Possible Variations/Applications:

- After each discussion allow participants to reassess their placement and “re-vote.”
- Participants can stand or sit to show their opinion.

The Great Game of Power

Source: Augusto Boal

Number of Players: 3+

Space: Open Area, the front space of a lecture hall

Materials: 3-5 chairs and a water bottle

What is it & why use it?

The Great Game of Power is an activity that explores representations of power through the construction of a visual image made of everyday objects. This strategy explores the relationship between observation and interpretation through the use of the DAR (Describe, Analyze, Relate) meaning-making routine.

Directions:

The facilitator asks for a volunteer to silently arrange the chairs and bottle into a formation so that one chair appears to have more power than all the other chairs. Any of the objects can be moved in any direction or placed on top of each other, but none of the objects can be removed altogether from the space. The volunteer does not reveal his/her thinking behind the arrangement. Invite the volunteer to return to the group and listen to the conversation. Next, the facilitator asks the following questions to encourage the rest of the group to interpret or “read” the image:

- Describe: *What do you see? Describe the way the chairs are positioned.*
- Analyze: *What do you think that could mean? Why do you say that? Which chair has the most power? Why? What could another perspective on this picture be?*
- Relate (ask questions related to whatever you are studying): *If we are thinking about this is relationship to a moment in history, what moment in time might this image represent?*

Encourage a number of different interpretations. Have another volunteer repeat the activity.

Reflection:

- *What are some of the different ways we saw power represented in this activity?*
- *What makes someone or something powerful?*
- *Who or what is powerful in our world now? Why?*

Possible Side-Coaching:

- *Remember you can arrange the chairs in any position you wish.*
- *How is water bottle positioned in your image? Consider what it represents.*

Possible Variations/Applications:

- As a final step in the activity, invite a participant to place and pose a body/their body in the image in an effort to take power away from the chair. This leads to reading a body as image in relationship to an object.
- Use this strategy to discuss types or systems of government, a chemical reaction or mathematical equation, character relationships, or representations of power within literature or a historical event.

It Made Me Think...

Source: Megan Alrutz
Number of Players: 5+
Space: Any, best in circle
Materials: None

What is it & why use it?

It Made Me Think... is facilitated at the end of a session, uses the repetition of a single phrase to encourage participants to reflect on themes explored during the class session. This activity is often used as a quick way to check for understanding and provides an elegant, ritualized closure for the final moments of a class period.

Directions:

Ask each participant to reflect on the day's work and think of one word or very short phrase that captures their opinion and completes the phrase "_____, it made me think." The phrase can describe something that intrigued or inspired them during class or something that was thought provoking or memorable. After they've had a moment to choose, participants go around the circle and say their word or words, followed by the phrase "It made me think." In practice, it might sound like this:

The importance of engagement in museums, it made me think.

Museums and reciprocity with their visitors, it made me think.

Museum 2.0, it made me think.

Shifting old paradigms on engagement, it made think.

How can I be part of the change, it made me think.

Reflection:

- *What did you notice about this activity?*
- *What ideas did you hear more than once in our reflection? Why do you think this is?*
- *Why is it important to think about and name our own thinking?*

Possible Side-Coaching:

- *Your phrase should be between one and five words.*
- *Your phrase/word doesn't have to be the most important or profound thought; it could be anything that made you think. However, please do stay on topic of today's class.*
- *It's okay if you make the same connection as someone else; don't worry if someone before you says what you want to say.*

Possible Variations/Applications:

- Invite participants to "popcorn" responses, meaning the participants share their responses one at a time in no particular order.
- In large lecture classes, this can serve as the "exit ticket" with participants writing their name and "_____, it made me think" as final ticket for attendance.