



## Key 2

## Teams

When you peek into a cooperative learning classroom, the first thing you notice is the seating arrangement.

Students are seated in teams.

Student teams are a defining

characteristic of cooperative learning;

they are the “cooperative” in cooperative

learning. Teams promote strong bonds between students, facilitate interaction over curriculum, and improve learning. Teams are one of the seven keys to successful cooperative learning. In this chapter, we'll cover when and how to use the various types of cooperative teams as well as techniques for forming and reforming teams.



*Working cooperatively in teams is a wonderful experience for students and provides opportunities for students to develop social and life skills that will serve them well throughout life.*

## The Basic Cooperative Learning Team

### The Four Student Team

To the extent possible, students are seated in teams of four. Why? Much of the rationale for cooperative learning is based on the benefits of active participation. As we add students to teams beyond four per team, fewer and fewer students are engaged at any one moment, and our classroom becomes less and less efficient.

In a class of 30, when one student is called on and responds, 1/30th of the class is actively participating. It would take 30 minutes to give everyone one minute to verbalize her/his ideas. If we divide the class into two large groups of 15 and allow one person at a time to talk within each group, during the discussion time we double the amount of active participation—1/15th of the class is talking. In only 15 minutes, we give each student one minute. As the group size is made smaller, the percentages get better. Groups of four allow 1/4 of the class to produce language at any one time—from the perspective of active participation, teams of four are twice as good as groups of eight.

### sneak peek

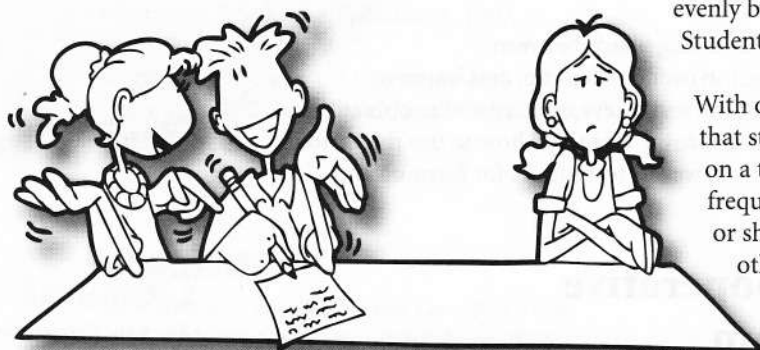
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If students talk one at a time, it takes only four minutes for each to get one minute, not the 30 minutes it would take in the whole-class structure.

Given this rationale, why not move to groups of three or even pairs? Why stick with teams of four? There are four reasons.

**1. Teams of Four Allow Pair Work.** Many structures such as RallyCoach and Timed Pair Share call for pair work. Many structures such as Three-Step Interview and Pairs Compare include pair work as part of the teamwork process. Pair work maximizes simultaneous interaction. Groups of three don't divide evenly into pairs.

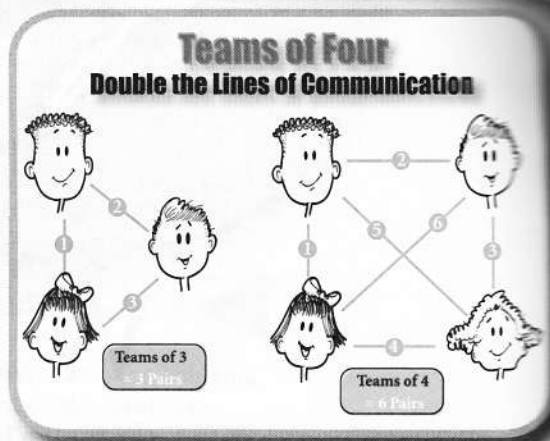
**2. Teams of Four Avoid Odd Man Out.** The social psychology of a group of three is often a pair and an outsider. Two people hit it off well and talk to each other often. Result: one is left out. In triads, it is easier for one student to "drop out" or be excluded than in a team of four.



**3. Teams of Four Optimize Cognitive and Linguistic Mismatch.** Compared to a group of three, a group of four doubles the probability of an optimum cognitive and linguistic mismatch. The Piagetian cognitive development work, as well as research in the area of linguistic development, indicates that we learn well from someone only somewhat different from our own level of development—someone who can provide stimulation in our Zone of Proximal Development. In a group of three, there are three possible pairs or lines of communication; in a group of four, there are six. (See box, Teams of Four Double the Lines of Communication.) Various structures take advantage of these many possible pairings.

## 4. Teams of Four Increase Variety.

In teams of four, the teacher can sometimes call for students to work as a team of four. Sometimes they work with their shoulder partner. Sometimes they work with their face partner. The flexible arrangements within a team of four create variety, which enhances interest.



**How to Handle Extra Students.** The class will only break evenly into teams of four a quarter of the time. The other three-quarters of the time, you will have one, two, or three extra students. When your class does not divide evenly by four, use the Extra Student Guidelines. (See box.)

With one student left over, place that student as a fifth member on a team with a student who is frequently absent, or where he or she would best learn or help others. With two students left

over, steal a student from one of the teams of four to create two teams of three. The two teams of three

should sit next to each other. During teamwork they may work as two triad teams, but they can break evenly into three pairs for pair activities. With three students left over, keep those three as a team.

## Dealing with Absences.

If two or more students from a single team are absent on the same day, teams can be adjusted for the day to accommodate the absences. See the Absent Teammates Guidelines box for how to deal with absences on the same team.

### Extra Student Guidelines

- ▶ **1 Extra Student**  
1 team of 5
- ▶ **2 Extra Students**  
2 teams of 3
- ▶ **3 Extra Students**  
1 team of 3

### Absent Teammates Guidelines

- ▶ **1 Teammate Absent**  
No change necessary.
- ▶ **2 Teammates Absent**  
Pull a student from a team of 5 or 4 to work with that team.
- ▶ **3 Teammates Absent**  
Move remaining student to the smallest team.

**Seating Arrangement.** Usually teammates have their individual desks pushed together to form a team table. This allows students to interact easily and work together on their various team tasks. The guidelines and many possible seating arrangements are covered in depth in *Chapter 8: Management*.

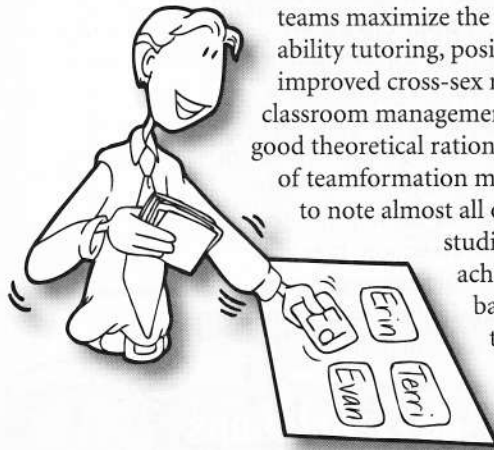
*"Nothing truly valuable can be achieved except by the disinterested cooperation of many individuals."*

—Albert Einstein

So why change teams at all? There are three important reasons to change teams, even if they are functioning well. The first reason is to offer students the opportunity to transfer their teamwork skills to a new social context.

## The Heterogeneous Base Team

Heterogeneous teams are recommended for stable base teams. The heterogeneous team is mixed in achievement level, sex, and ethnicity. When possible, the base team is a microcosm of the classroom's diversity. Heterogeneous teams maximize the potential for cross-ability tutoring, positive race relations, improved cross-sex relations, and efficient classroom management. Although there is good theoretical rationale for using a variety of teamformation methods, it is important to note almost all of the empirical



studies showing academic achievement gains are based on heterogeneous teams. Heterogeneous teams are research-based.

Students who are exposed to multiple groupings are better prepared to thrive in diversity. They leave the classroom more prepared to work as an effective team member or leader in any team. Working cooperatively in teams is a wonderful experience for students and provides contextual opportunities for students to develop social and life skills that will transfer to many social situations throughout life.

The second reason to change teams is team dynamics. Even with heterogeneous teams, there may be a team that does not work well together. For some reason, the chemistry just isn't right. When we change teams every six weeks, over the course of the school year, students are members of six or seven teams, allowing plenty of exposure to diversity and various team dynamics.

The third reason to change teams is, to put it bluntly, to share the burden. No matter how much we work on social skills, some students may be bossy, inclined to put others down, or unable to understand points of view different from their own. If we never changed teams, the only team experience the other three teammates would have would be with a "difficult" teammate. Further, having the difficult teammate work in a variety of teams increases the probability that student will acquire much-needed teamwork skills.

## Team Assignment Tips

- When first announcing team assignments, name tags are placed on the team tables, indicating where students are to sit. Rather than a sequential reading by the teacher of each student's name and team assignment, the teacher simply places the name tags at each seat and then tells students to find their seats.
- Numbered mobiles above each team table make good signs for students and for teachers. As a teambuilder, teams create their own team mobile with their individual names and team name.

## Team Duration

As a general guideline, we suggest changing base teams after six weeks. If teams are changed too frequently, students don't get the opportunity to bond fully as a team and to create a strong team identity. Teammates who know and trust each other work very well together. There is a short adjustment period when forming new teams. Changing teams too frequently introduces too many adjustment periods and creates a bit of uncertainty.

**The Various Types of Teams.** The basic cooperative learning team is a heterogeneous team of four that stays together for approximately six weeks. If we use heterogeneous teams exclusively, however, the high achievers would never interact (missing important academic stimulation) and the low achievers would never be on the same team (missing leadership opportunities). To reap the full potential of cooperative learning, we use more than one type of team.

We will examine here the four main types of teams and their associated teamformation methods. Let's start with the most common type of team—Heterogeneous teams.



## Team Type 1

## Heterogeneous Teams

A number of researchers and theorists have identified heterogeneous student teams as a defining characteristic of cooperative learning.

Heterogeneous teams are mixed ability, mixed sex, and mixed race. We put a high, two middle, and a low achieving student on each team; we put males and females on each team and to the extent possible, each team is ethnically diverse. In general, heterogeneous teams are preferred because they 1) increase opportunities for peer tutoring and support, 2) improve cross-race and cross-sex relations and integration, and 3) make classroom management easier—having a high achiever on each team can be like having one teacher aide for every three students. Non-heterogeneous teams can be formed in a variety of ways, including self-

## The Four Major Types of Teams

1	<b>Heterogeneous Teams</b>	Mixed ability, sex, race teams
2	<b>Random Teams</b>	Randomly formed teams
3	<b>Student-Selected Teams</b>	Students select own teams
4	<b>Homogeneous Teams</b>	Teams with a shared trait (ability, interest, language)

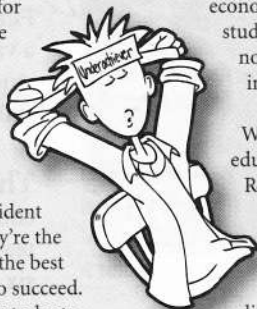
selection (allowing students to group themselves by friendships or interests) and random selection (students draw a number from 1 to 8 and sit down at the table with the corresponding number). Self-selection runs a strong risk of promoting or reinforcing status hierarchies in the classroom (“in-” and “out-groups”); random selection runs the risk of creating “loser” teams (the four lowest achievers or the four greatest behavior problems in the classroom may end up on the same team). Stable, heterogeneous, teacher-formed teams avoid these pitfalls and maximize the potential for achievement gains.

## Heterogeneous Teams, Tracking, Labels, and Expectations

Using heterogeneous ability level teams in the classroom is the opposite of homogeneous ability grouping and tracking. Homogeneous ability groups and tracking are common educational practices that are fraught with problems. Ability grouping or streaming occurs when the teacher forms similar-ability level groups within the classroom such as reading groups. The teacher may have unbiased names for the groups such as the green group, blue group, and purple group, but students quickly identify the differences. They have their own names for the groups: the top group is the “eagles,” the middle group is “seagulls,” and the low group is the “droppings.”

Tracking occurs at the class level, too. Students are placed in different tracks based on their ability level. It is most evident in high school. There’s the advanced placement track. They’re the students heading for fine universities. They’re often given the best teachers, most challenging curriculum, and are expected to succeed. The middle group is comprised of the normal ability level students. They are state college and community college bound. The curriculum is not so challenging and the expectations are not so high. The remedial track, otherwise known as the dummies and dirtbags, don’t have high hopes. The football coach gives them independent worksheet work (“busy work”) in an attempt to mitigate the discipline problems.

Now this picture may be an offensive gross generality to some, but unfortunately there is quite a bit of truth to it. Separate is far from equal. Ability grouping and tracking are more responsible for perpetuating inequality than they are effective for addressing preexisting differences. Research has shown that labels and expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies.<sup>1</sup>



On a macro-level, heterogeneity is found to close the achievement gap between the races and socioeconomic classes. Studies found that racial integration could cut the gap in standardized test scores between blacks and whites by as much as one-half by bringing the bottom up rather than bringing the top down.<sup>2,3</sup> Recently, districts that have used economic integration—limiting the proportion of low-income students in a single school by integrating schools’ socioeconomic composition—show very promising results with increased test scores and decreased dropout rates.<sup>4,5</sup>

We use heterogeneous groups in the classroom to equalize educational opportunities, resources, and expectations. Research demonstrates cooperative learning does not bring the high achievers down. Quite the opposite. It brings the low achievers up. Cooperative learning narrows the achievement gap. See *Chapter 3: What Does the Research Say?* Imagine a school in which students from different socioeconomic levels and ethnicities were put on heterogeneous teams from a very early age. They were all expected to succeed and given the best engaging instruction and the best-available curriculum. What would be the result at the end of their schooling process? Would there still be an ability-level discrepancy? Perhaps. But nowhere near the achievement gap crisis that our nation faces today.

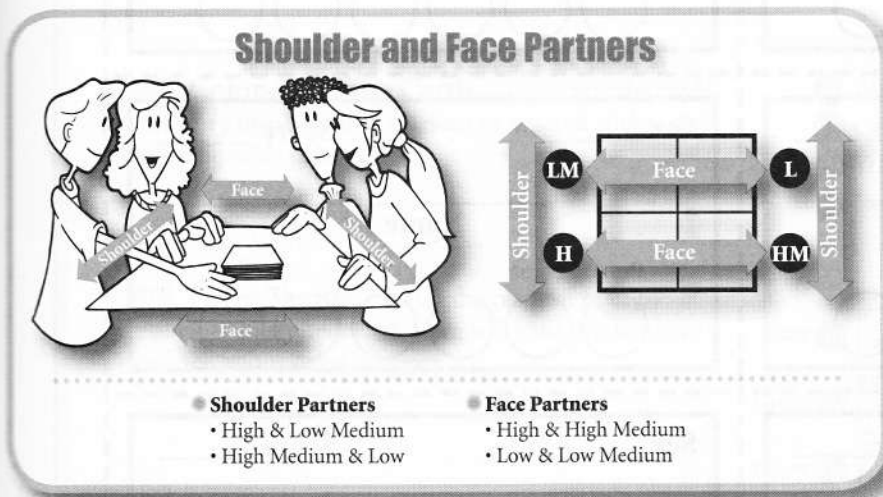
When we form heterogeneous groups in the classroom, we must bear in mind the insidious nature of labels. We rank students to create balanced, heterogeneous teams. But students never see the ranks. We have high expectations for all students in the class, and we take great satisfaction in watching all our students living up to those expectations.

### Unequal Numbers of Boys and Girls.

If there are more boys than girls or more girls than boys, usually the best strategy is not to share the scarce resources equally, assigning one boy or one girl to each team. One boy and three girls often amounts to the male receiving an inordinate amount of attention. One girl and three boys often results in the female being ignored by the three males. Solution: Assign students to teams of two boys and two girls until you run out of boys or girls; the remaining teams will have either all boys or all girls.

### Ability Level Shoulder and Face

**Partners.** Some teachers report better luck if during initial team assignments they have students sit so that the high achiever is next to a middle achiever and across from a middle achiever; they place the low achiever kitty-corner to high achiever. Some high achievers initially have difficulty working with students far below their level. The graphic below illustrates a seating arrangement that minimizes interaction between the highest and lowest achievers on the team.

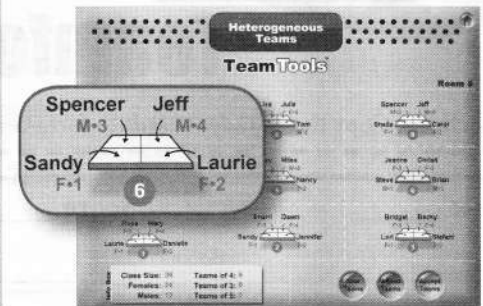


## Heterogeneous Teamformation Methods

There are many different ways to effectively form heterogeneous teams. Different teachers prefer different methods. Below, a variety of methods are presented, so you can select your favorite. Remember, heterogeneous base teams should be long-term, so you only have to form new teams approximately every six weeks.

Recommended Resource

## TeamTools Software to Form Teams



### TeamTools Software

TeamTools software makes teamformation easy. For each student, you enter: 1) name, 2) male or female, and 3) a numeric score from 0 to 100. The score can be a quiz score, class grade, assessment score, or any number that represents student ability. Next, you click a button and TeamTools takes your class info and recommends teams for you, showing student names around team desks (see sample above). If you like the recommended teams, you save, print, or display them for your class. If you're not happy with the suggested teams, you push a button to try again, or fine-tune the teams yourself by moving students around.

To form cooperative learning teams, TeamTools maximizes the teams of four. Extra students are assigned to either a team of five or one or two teams of three. TeamTools takes heterogeneous ability as the most important variable, and always creates balanced ability teams. Next, it tries to put two girls and two boys on each team, but when you run out of balanced sex teams, it creates same-sex teams so the solo boy or solo girl are not given too much or too little attention. Students are strategically placed on teams so shoulder partners and face partners are of the recommended ability and sex to increase tutoring and equalize interaction between boys and girls. It's really a time-saver and forms ideal teams for Kagan Structures. Of all the ways to form cooperative teams, TeamTools is our favorite.

# Teamformation Cards



Instructions. Copy these student cards to form cooperative learning teams.

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Prior Teams

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



### Card Sorting Method

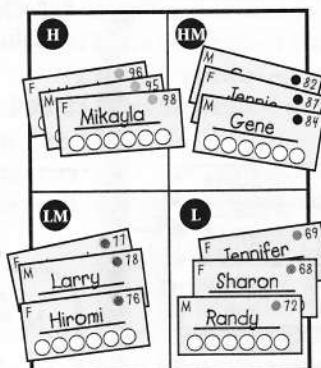
Anita Kissinger (Director of Staff Development for Springfield, MO Public Schools) developed

the Card Sorting Method for forming heterogeneous teams. See box for the steps of the Card Sorting Method.

## Card Sorting Method

**Step 1. Make Cards.** Write students' names, sex, and test scores on Teamformation Cards (blackline provided on the previous page), one student per card.

**Step 2. Sort the Cards.** Divide the total number of students in the class by four to determine the number of teams. For example, if there are 29 students in the class divided by four, there will be 7 teams with 1 extra student. The cards are sorted by achievement level so that there are 7 in each of the four categories: High, High Medium, Low Medium, and Low. If your math resulted in extra students, use the Extra Student Guidelines (see box).



### Extra Student Guidelines

- ▶ **1 Extra Student**  
The High Medium OR Low Medium category will have 1 more student.
- ▶ **2 Extra Students**  
The High Medium AND the Low Medium category will have 1 more student each.
- ▶ **3 Extra Students**  
Three categories will have 1 more student.

**Step 3. Color-Code the Cards.** Color-code the cards by category using colored markers or colored sticker dots. Here's a possible color scheme:

- H Blue = High
- HM Green = High Medium
- LM Yellow = Low Medium
- L Red = Low

**Step 4. Form Teams.** Lay out the cards in rows by category as illustrated. Each team will have one student from each ability-level category.

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3
Blue ● H	F Mikayla 98 ○○○○○	M Kyle 94 ○○○○○	F Laurie 96 ○○○○○
Green ● HM	M Tigrone 82 ○○○○○	M Gene 84 ○○○○○	F Hillary 89 ○○○○○
Yellow ● LM	M José 79 ○○○○○	F Shawna 78 ○○○○○	M Jeremie 76 ○○○○○
Red ● L	F Jennifer 69 ○○○○○	F Sharon 68 ○○○○○	M Randy 72 ○○○○○

**Forming New Teams.** This card sorting method works well for forming new teams. Record students' team assignments at the bottom of the cards. Then, lay out the cards as in step 4. Check down each team column to see if students were already on the same team. If so, exchange a student for another student of the same ability level.

	Team 1	Team 2
Blue ● H	5 ○○○○○	1 ○○○○○
Green ● HM	4 ○○○○○	5 ○○○○○
Yellow ● LM	3 ○○○○○	4 ○○○○○
Red ● L	2 ○○○○○	3 ○○○○○

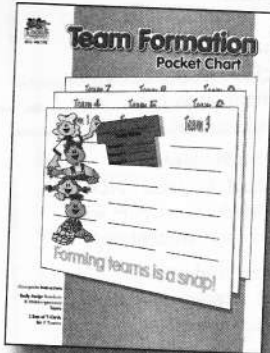
Prior Team Numbers

## Teamformation Pocket Chart Method

A Teamformation Pocket Chart is available from Kagan Publishing to easily form and re-form heterogeneous teams. The nice thing about the pocket chart is how easy it is to adjust teams and to evaluate prior team assignments.

Recommended Resource ★

### Teamformation Pocket Chart



Team 1	Team 2
Tigers	Lions
Maria	Bryan
Kent	Juan
Jenny	Kelly
Mikey	Laurie

Form teams using color-coded T-Cards that slip into a team sheet to post

To make switches, move up or down one student from the middle to readjust. Once you have selected the first team, check off the students' names on your list so you know not to select them again.

### Step 3. Select Remaining Teams.

Repeat the procedure to select the remaining teams of four.

**Step 4. Assign "Extras."** Assign one extra student to one team of five, two extra students to two teams of three, and three extra students to one team of three.

## Achievement-Ranked List Method

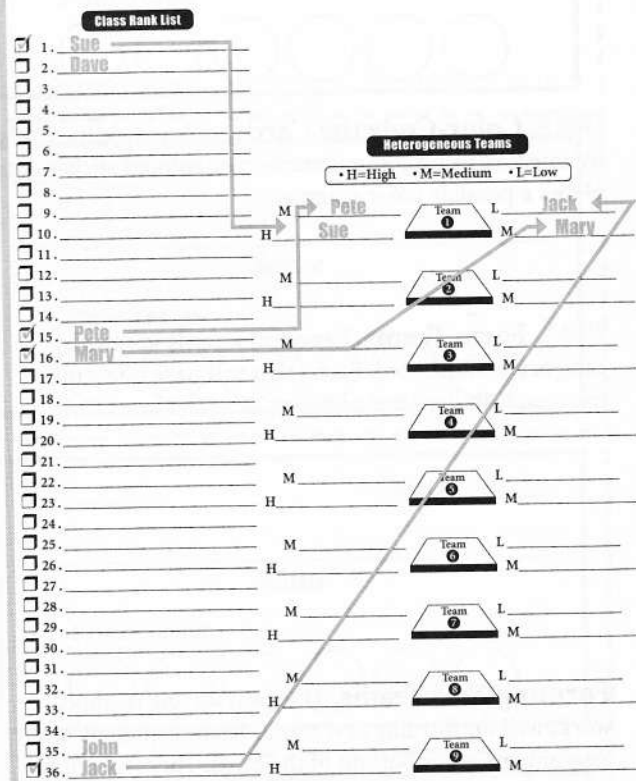
In this method, the teacher ranks students on a list by achievement level. Then the teacher uses the list to select a high, two mediums, and a low for each team. Use the blackline, Forming Heterogeneous Teams (on the next page).

**Step 1. Rank-Order Students.** Produce a numbered list of students, from highest to lowest achiever. The list does not have to be perfect. To produce the list, use one of the following (in order of preference): pretest, recent past test, past grades, or best guess.

**Step 2. Select First Team.** Choose the top student on the list, the bottom student on the list, and two students from the middle of the list. Assign them to Team 1, unless they are:

- All one sex;
- All one ethnicity in a mixed ethnicity group;
- Worst enemies or best friends;
- Incompatible (e.g., all chatterboxes, all bossy, all introverts, all easily distractible)

## Achievement-Ranked List Method Forming Heterogeneous Teams





**Instructions**

**Step 1.** Fill in your students' names in rank order by ability.

**Class Rank List**

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. \_\_\_\_\_
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- 20. \_\_\_\_\_
- 21. \_\_\_\_\_
- 22. \_\_\_\_\_
- 23. \_\_\_\_\_
- 24. \_\_\_\_\_
- 25. \_\_\_\_\_
- 26. \_\_\_\_\_
- 27. \_\_\_\_\_
- 28. \_\_\_\_\_
- 29. \_\_\_\_\_
- 30. \_\_\_\_\_
- 31. \_\_\_\_\_
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- 33. \_\_\_\_\_
- 34. \_\_\_\_\_
- 35. \_\_\_\_\_
- 36. \_\_\_\_\_


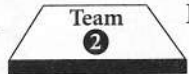

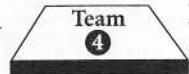
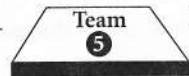
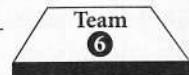
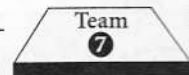
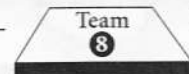
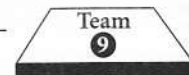
# Forming Heterogeneous Teams

## Achievement-Ranked List Method

- Step 2.** Select a High, Low, and two Mediums to assign the first team. Check off the students' names from your list.
- Step 3.** Assign the rest of the teams to teams of four.
- Step 4.** Assign extra students using the following guidelines:
- 1 Extra Student—1 team of 5.
  - 2 Extra Students—2 teams of 3.
  - 3 Extra Students—1 team of 3.

**Heterogeneous Teams**

• H=High • M=Medium • L=Low

M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____
M _____		L _____
H _____		M _____

### The Sticky Note Method

First, divide your class into four equal parts: High, High Medium, Low Medium, and Low. Next, write student names on color-coded sticky notes. All the Highs are one color, all the High Mediums another color, and so on. When forming teams, simply select four sticky notes, one of each color. If the team doesn't feel right, it is easy to un-stick the notes and form a new team assignment. Some teachers even stick their sticky notes on a classroom schematic so it doubles as a seating arrangement chart.

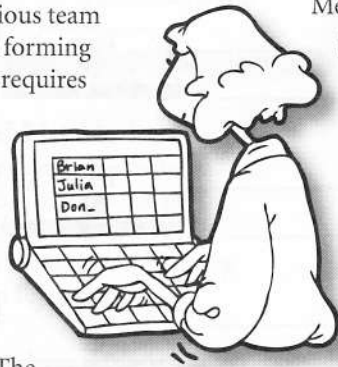


so students from the same team are one below another, or using your original spreadsheet, insert a row where you wish to move a student, then move the student to that empty row (if you try to drag a row on top of existing data, you will overwrite that data).

Once you're happy with your selection, add the team numbers in the third column, "Assignment 1." By recording your team assignments, when it comes time to form new teams, you can see if students have worked on the same team. A nice thing about spreadsheets is you can sort on any column to easily manipulate your list.

### The Spreadsheet Method

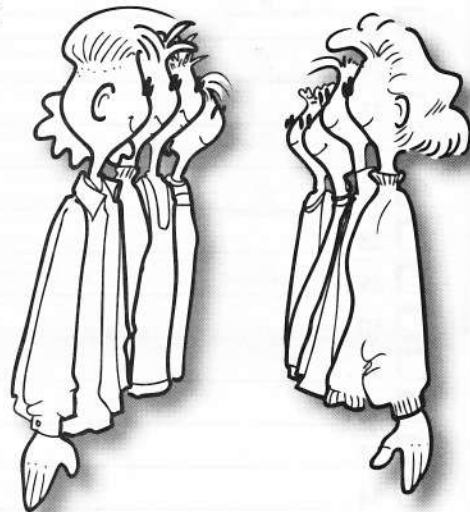
A spreadsheet application such as Excel can be very helpful in team formation and for keeping track of previous team assignments to use when forming new teams. This method requires a basic working knowledge of spreadsheets. Here's how it works: Create a "Students" column with students rank-ordered by achievement. The next column is students' "Ability Level." The rank list is divided into four equal parts and students are labeled as High, High Medium, Low Medium, and Low. Now, move student rows in your spreadsheet to represent your team selection, ensuring you have a high, two middle, and a low on each team. There are two ways to move students around in your spreadsheet while keeping the rest of your data intact. Either create a second spreadsheet and copy and paste rows



### Pairs Pair Method

Dr. Julie High, author of *Second Language Learning Through Cooperative Learning*,<sup>6</sup> developed Pairs Pair. Students are divided into four groups; High, High Medium, Low Medium, and Low. Students are not told the groups are based on ability level. The High and Low groups meet on one side of the room, and the two middle groups meet on the other. The students then form pairs (High and Low on one side of the room and High Medium-Low Medium on the other). Next the pairs pair. Thus the students have selected heterogeneous teams. Julie is a very experienced cooperative learning teacher and trainer, and she reports that Pairs Pair has produced the best functioning teams in her classroom. Pairs Pair is good for classrooms in which there is not a big ability-level gap between students.

It is not recommended for classrooms in which students would recognize they are initially grouped by their ability level.



### The Spreadsheet Method

	A	B	C	D
<b>Forming Teams with Spreadsheets</b>				
1	Students	Ability	Assignment 1	Assignment 2
2	Larry	High	1	8
3	Terry	High	2	7
4	Peter	High	3	6
5	Esther	High	4	5

### Team Leader Method

The following is a version of a method developed by Richard Shetley (Alta Loma Junior High School, Alta Loma, CA). This is an easy, fair way to have students select their own heterogeneous teams, and it provides some students the most powerful peer inclusion experience of their life!



**Step 1. Select Team Leaders.** Select the highest achieving 7 or 8 students as team leaders, one per team.

#### Step 2. Leadership Meeting.

Meet with the leaders as a group. Explain to them that the success of the team approach depends on mixed ability-level teams. Have them decide which of the lowest ability students will be on each team. Explain to them what they are to do the next day.

#### Step 3. Leaders Choose

**Teammates.** The next day in class, announce that there will be student teams and announce the team leaders. Ask the team leaders to choose someone to be on their team. As per agreement, the team leaders each go up to one of the low ability students and say something like, "I want you to be on my team."

Be prepared. Many of the low ability students have never been selected by their peers for anything. They are used to being the leftovers. There may be tears or at least moist eyes.

#### Step 4. High-Low Pair Choose Middle.

The leader and his/her first selection sit down together and decide on a second choice from the pool of remaining middle ability-level students. Students are informed that they cannot choose teams all of one sex. The teacher maintains the option to make final decisions and adjustments if necessary.

#### Step 5. High-Low-Middle Triad Choose

**Last Teammate.** The three members choose the remaining teammate.

## Team Type 2

### Random Teams

As the name suggests, random teams are truly random. There is no rhyme or reason why students are placed on the same team. The team is formed completely by chance. The teacher could pull four names out of a hat and put those four students together as a team. The four highest achievers could be on the same team. The four lowest achievers could be on the same team. Best friends could be on the same team. Sworn enemies could be on the same team.

*Random teams add excitement and suspense to the classroom. Who will I get to work with today?*

Why in the world would a teacher want to form random teams? Because random teams are fun. Students like the opportunity to work with classmates beyond their immediate teammates. Random teams may be very short-lived as in the case of a five-minute classbuilding activity, or for a temporary breakout to discuss an issue with new teammates, or to practice a skill or procedure. Or the random teams may last long-term, but meet only briefly once a week to work on a project. Random teams add excitement and suspense to the classroom. Who will I get to work with today?

However, random teams are not recommended for long-term stable base teams. They are not balanced by ability level, so teams will finish at different rates. And they are not controlled for student characteristics, so the two class chatterboxes could be put together and easily get off task.





## Random Teamformation Methods

Early in the development of cooperative learning methods, we relied on intrusive and time-consuming methods for forming random teams. With time and with the development of structures, we became more sophisticated and found ways to form random teams without special manipulatives or taking time from academics. Let's look first at some of the early, formal random teamformation methods. Then we'll turn to methods embedded in structures that can be used while teaching any content, without stealing time from the content.

### Traditional Methods

#### Counting Off

Early in cooperative learning, Counting Off was the most frequently used random teamformation method, but it soon lost favor as it took time during class. To use the method, you first divide the number of students in the class by four to know how many teams you will have. For example, if you have 35 students, you know you will have eight teams of four with three left over to make one team of three, so there will be nine teams in the class. Next you have students count off by nine, telling them to either write down their number or to remember it. To count off, the first student says "1," the student behind her says "2," and so on until the students reach "9." The student after "9" each time says "1." In our example, because there are 35 students, the last student would say "8." (If there were 36 students, our class would divide evenly by four and there would be four teams of nine, so the last student would say "9.") When all students have a number, they are told to find and stand with the others with their number. In our example, there will be four 1's, four 2's, and so on, with three 9's. Once students are standing with their number, we instruct them to sit down as a team. The three 9's would be a team of three. If the count-off



resulted in two teams of three, we have the two teams of three sit together so that during pair work, they are three pairs and no one is left out. If the count-off resulted in three teams of three, we would probably break up one of those teams and fill in the other two teams to become a team of four and a team of five.

#### Number Cards

The teacher creates a deck of number cards. First, the teacher divides the number of students in the class by four to determine how many teams there will be. For example, if the teacher has 32 students in her class, she divides by four to find she will have eight teams. The teacher then creates a deck of number cards with four 1's, four 2's, and so on, up to four 8's. As students enter class, the teacher stands by the door and hands each a card from the shuffled deck. Team tables are numbered and a student receiving a 4, for example, goes to table 4 to sit. This method works well and does not take time from

academics. One caution: once students know how the method works, if the teacher does not prevent it, the students will trade cards so they can sit with their friends.

#### Playing Cards

Playing cards work exactly like Number Cards, but they have two big advantages. First, the teacher does

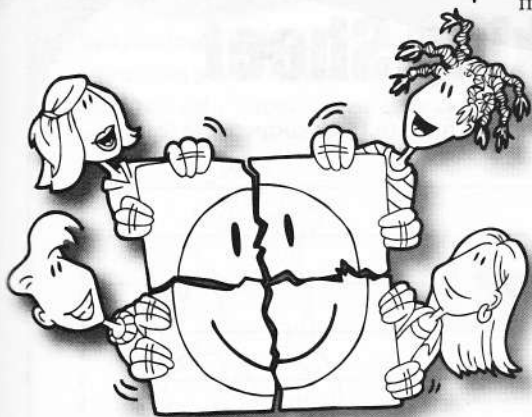
not have to make up the deck, but rather uses a store-bought deck of playing cards. Second, the cards have a built-in role assignment. Typically, the heart is the Praiser; the club is the Taskmaster; the spade is the Materials Monitor; and the diamond is the Recorder. Of course, different roles can be assigned to the four suits, depending on the project or task.

### Fun, Teambuilding Methods

Two random teamformation methods have built-in teambuilding. Puzzled People has students solve a mini jigsaw puzzle to find their teammates; Animal Sounds has students find their new teammates with their eyes closed!

## Puzzled People

A picture is torn into four parts, and each student gets one part. Like a jigsaw puzzle, students



move about the room to find their teammates with matching pieces of the puzzle. Once all the puzzles are solved, students sit down as a team.

**Step 1. Prepare Pictures.** The teacher selects one picture for each

team in the class. If there are eight teams, the teacher selects eight pictures. Tearing full-page pictures (related to the theme of the lesson) out of old magazines, works well.

**Step 2. Tear Pictures.** The teacher distributes the pictures to students and has one student tear the picture into four jagged parts. That student keeps one part and gives the three other parts to three other students.

**Step 3. Mix and Trade.** Have students mill around the room, repeatedly trading picture pieces with other students.

**Step 4. Solve Puzzle.** Call, "Stop!" and then let students solve the puzzles by grouping with the others who hold pieces of the same picture.

**Step 5. Sit as a Team.** Tell students to sit down as a team with their new teammates.

**Variations.** Puzzled People can use academic content. For language arts, the four pieces can be four sentences in a content-related statement, or four lines of a proverb or poem. For social studies, the four pieces can be pieces of a map.

## Animal Sounds

Animal Sounds is a raucous, fun way to form teams. Students are each given a card with the name of an animal or picture of the animal. There are four cards for each animal. Students mix through the room trading cards with each other until the teacher calls, "Stop." To their surprise, the teacher says: "look at your card. Now close your eyes. With your eyes closed, you

must find your teammates by making the sound of your animal!" The classroom is transformed into a wild zoo as students team up. The Animal Sounds blackline (on page 7.15) is provided for your entertainment and that of your students!

## Structures with Built-In Random Teamformation

A number of structures have built-in random teamformation methods. The advantage of this approach is that random teams can be formed with no special preparation, no special materials, and without taking time away from academic content. In effect, we form random teams during our lesson, without missing a beat.

### Traveling Heads Together

Traveling Heads Together is a variation of Numbered Heads Together (see *Chapter 6*). After students have put their heads together to formulate their best answer to the teacher's question, the teacher calls a number, say "3," and Student #3 in each team stands. Next, the teacher tells the seated students to wildly beckon for a new Student #3. All the Student #3s travel to a new team to share their best answer.

To form random teams while playing Traveling Heads Together, the teacher simply calls a different number on three consecutive rounds, instructing the students that when they travel, they cannot sit down at a team where a teammate from their original team is seated. After three rounds, all students have all new teammates, and we can have them work together as a team for the remainder of the class period.

### Stir-the-Class

Stir-the-Class is just like Traveling Heads Together except student teams begin by standing as a team around the perimeter of the room (see *Chapter 6*). Random teams are formed after three rounds of Stir-the-Class if the teacher has the first student rotate one ahead, the next student rotate two ahead, and the third student rotate three ahead.

### One Stray

Three rounds of One Stray, with the straying student remaining at the team they joined, forms random teams exactly like three rounds of Traveling Heads Together. Again, students need to know they cannot stray to a team where an original teammate is seated.



# Team Tracking Sheet

Instructions. Use this form to track cooperative teams.

Start Date \_\_\_\_\_

End Date \_\_\_\_\_

Notes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

Team Name \_\_\_\_\_

LM \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_  
H \_\_\_\_\_ HM \_\_\_\_\_

• H=High • HM=High Medium • LM=Low Medium • L=Low

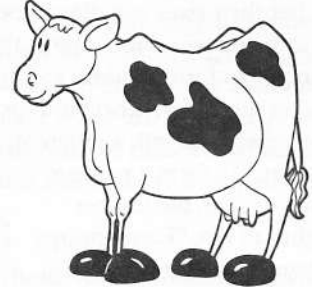


# Animal Sounds

**Instructions.** Make four copies of this blackline. There are ten animals—enough for up to ten teams. Only use as many animals as you have teams. Cut apart the animal cards and give every student one card. Students mix and trade cards until you call, "Stop." Then, they close their eyes and make the sounds of their animal to find their teammates.



**Lion**



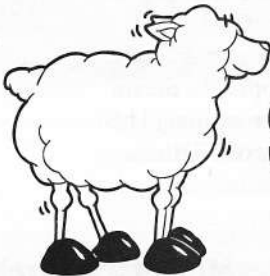
**Cow**



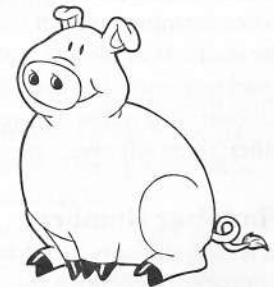
**Cat**



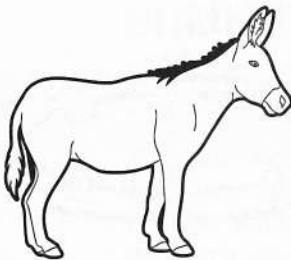
**Monkey**



**Sheep**



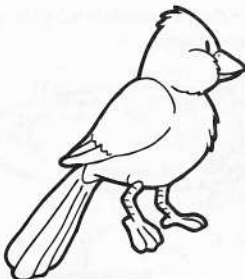
**Pig**



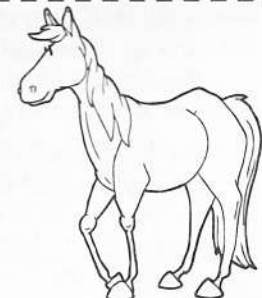
**Donkey**



**Dog**



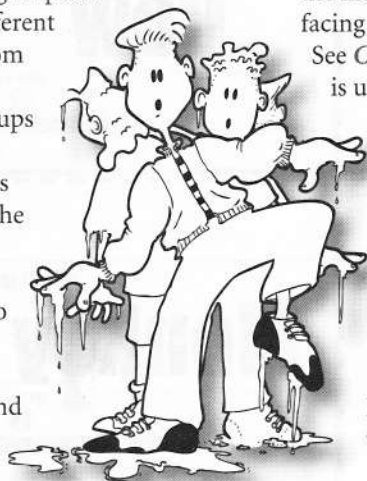
**Bird**



**Horse**

### Mix-Freeze-Group

In Mix-Freeze-Group, students each have a number from one to four and are mixing in the classroom until the teacher calls, "Freeze." The teacher then gives two directives: what size group to form and who should be in the group. For example, to form random groups of three the teacher might say, "Form groups of three, everyone with a different number." To form a random group of four, the teacher might call out, "Form groups of four, even numbers together and odd numbers together." Depending on the number of students in the class, groups will not always work out evenly. To handle the "leftovers," the teacher creates an area in the class called the "lost and found." Students who did not find a group go to the lost and found.



When forming random teams of four, we assign the students in the lost and found to teams in the usual way—one left over: one team of five; two left over: two teams of three that sit next to each other; three left over: one team of three.

### Find Your Number

In teams, students each have a number. This allows the teacher to easily assign roles ("for this task, Student #3 will be the beaker cleaner") or to use the Selector Spinner or SelectorTools (see Chapter 8) to call on a student to respond. Given that students have their numbers, it becomes easy to form random teams on the fly. We simply say,

*When I say, "Go," everyone will stand up, put a hand up high using your fingers to show your number, and form groups of four, everyone with the same number. Once you have formed your group, put your hands down so those who are still looking can easily find each other.*

Once students are standing in groups of four, we have them sit down as a group to work as a random team.

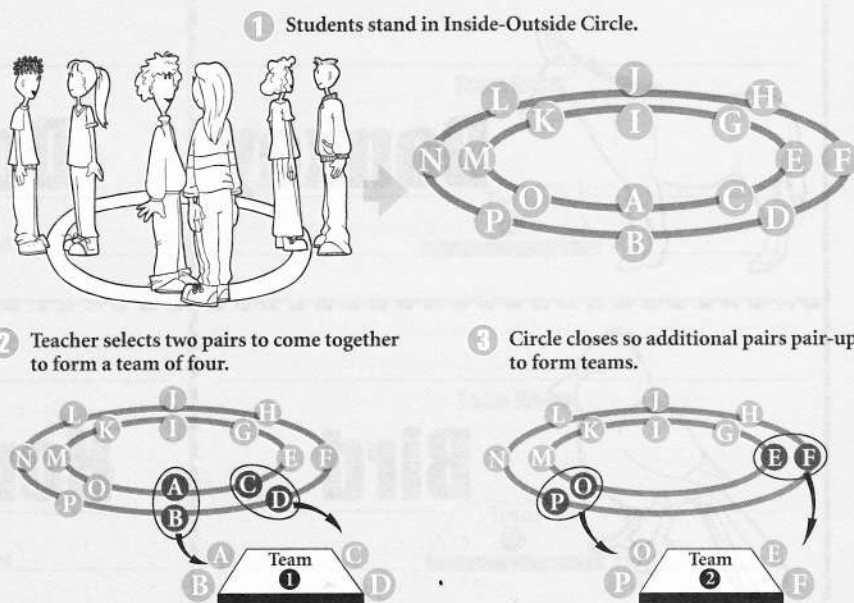
### Inside-Outside Circle

During Inside-Outside Circle, students stand in two concentric circles around the room with the inside circle facing in and the outside circle facing out, so each student is facing a partner.

See Chapter 6: Structures. Inside-Outside Circle is used to have students respond to teacher questions or question cards, but we can use the structure to move smoothly from Inside-Outside Circle into random teams. To include a built-in team builder, we have students do a Three-Step Interview, but the first two steps of the interview happen while the students are standing in the circle, and the last step happens once they sit down as a team. Does this all sound confusing? It becomes very simple if you follow these steps:

**Step 1. Fun Interview.** While students are standing in the Inside-Outside Circle, they do a Pair Interview with their face partner, each interviewing the other on a fun topic like dream vacation, favorite food, or ideal profession. (The Pair Interview is the first two steps of a Three-Step Interview.)

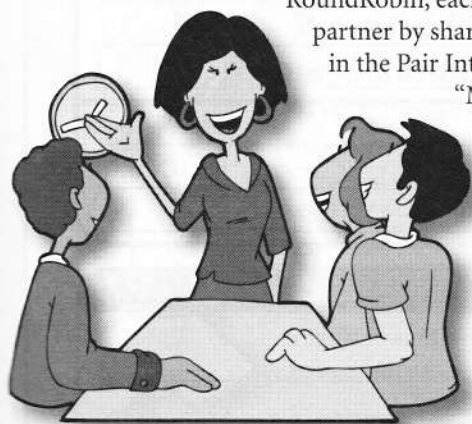
### Forming Random Teams From Inside-Outside Circle



**Step 2. Pairs Selected.** The teacher selects two adjacent pairs to team up to form a team of four and sit down as a team.

**Step 3. Pairs Pair.** A gap is created when the first team leaves the circle. Pairs from each side walk toward each other to close the gap. When they meet, they leave to sit down as a team. The process is repeated to form additional teams. (See graphic on page 7.16). If there is an extra pair, steal a person from one of the groups of four to form two groups of three and have them sit next to each other.

**Step 4. Timed RoundRobin.** When students are seated as a team, they do a Timed RoundRobin, each introducing their partner by sharing what they learned in the Pair Interview. For example, "My new friend, Steve, would spend his dream vacation...." (The RoundRobin is the third step of the Three-Step Interview.) We don't tell students in advance that we will be moving from Inside-Outside Circle to random teams. Thus it comes as a surprise when pairs pair to form a group of four, and as another surprise when students are asked to take turns introducing their partner. Occasional unexpected events in our class create stimulation.



### Team Type 3

## Student-Selected Teams

On an occasional basis, students are allowed to form their own teams. When given the opportunity, students usually select partners and teammates that they know and like. This familiarity can be a big plus for team dynamics. Students having similar interests facilitates team decision making. Students have already bonded, so less time for teambuilding is required.

Students enjoy the control and feeling trusted to occasionally select their own teams. The enjoyment of friendships spill over into the academic realm, making learning more fun and productive. Allowing friends to work together at times can bring new energy to academics.

## Student-Selected Teamformation Methods

### Free-Choice Method

If the teacher does not have academic information to form balanced heterogeneous teams at the beginning of the year, the teacher may use student-selected teams. Students are happily surprised to learn they can sit anywhere they want and with whom they want, as long as they form groups of four. The teacher announces that these free-choice teams are temporary (only for the first week or two), so students get adjusted to working in teams and class is fun as well as productive.

During this free-choice team period, the teacher pays careful attention to friendship patterns and makes notes for future reference. Who chooses to work together? Who isn't chosen by anyone? Who works together well? Which students are a management problem and should never be put on the same team? Use the Team Dynamics Observation Form (on the next page) to record your observations. For the confident cooperative learning teacher, this student-selected trial period can set a positive class tone and provide valuable insight to student dynamics.

### Team Captains

The teacher selects a Team Captain for each team. If there are to be eight teams, for example, eight Team Captains are selected. The eight captains each go to a different team table. The rest of the class stands up around the perimeter of the room. Each captain takes a turn selecting a new teammate. When selected, students join their captain at their new team table. Team Captains can consult with their newly-selected teammates for their next teammate. When all students are selected, the teams are already sitting at their team table, ready to get started. This approach must be used very cautiously. The last students to be chosen may feel like "leftovers."



### Numbered Choice

Numbered Choice turns the tables around, allowing students to decide for themselves which team they want to be on. Each student picks a number out of a hat corresponding to the number of students in the class. The class





# Team Dynamics Observation Form

**Instructions.** Use this form to record your observations of student interaction patterns.

## Perfect Partners

Students who work well together

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

## Problem Partners

Students to avoid putting on the same team

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Student \_\_\_\_\_

Reason \_\_\_\_\_

## Student Observations

Individual student observations to consider when forming teams

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Observations \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Observations \_\_\_\_\_

Student \_\_\_\_\_

Observations \_\_\_\_\_

forms a circle around the classroom. The student who selected number one sits at any team table. The student who selected number two can sit at the same table or any other table. This process continues until all students have made their selection.

### StandUp–HandUp–PairUp, Pairs Pair

Students put a hand up and stand up in the classroom. They find a partner they want to work with, put their hands down, and stand shoulder-to-shoulder. If students are seeking just a partner, their job is done. They sit down with their new partner. But if they are forming a team, the pairs pair up with another pair to form a team of four.



### Potential Pitfalls and Solutions

**Off-Task Behavior.** Friends share interests beyond academics and can get off task. To avoid off-task behavior, the teacher makes it very clear in advance that teams will only get one warning for off-task behavior. If the off-task behavior persists, they will be split up. Students find working with their friends rewarding and will make an effort to keep focused.

**Last To Be Picked.** No one likes to be the last picked for a team. It can be a blow to an already fragile self image. If left to their own devices, low achievers, “loners,” and “losers” will be the last to be picked or may form a “loser” team by default. To avoid this problem, the teacher identifies the students least likely to be selected by other students and selects them to be Team Captains. The Numbered Choice method is also an effective solution as students decide for themselves which teams they’d like to work on.

## Team Type 4

### Homogeneous Teams

Homogeneous means “the same or similar.” Students on homogeneous teams share the same or similar characteristics along one dimension. Students can be of the same ability level. Students can share similar interests. Or, same language teams can be formed to facilitate content acquisition for the bilingual or multilingual classroom.

## How to Form Homogenous Ability Teams

The easiest way to form homogeneous ability teams is using an achievement ranked list. The bottom four students are Team One. The next four are Team Two, and so on. Unlike forming heterogeneous teams, sex and ethnicity are not taken into consideration. However, for management purposes, it is still advisable to keep best friends and worst enemies from being on the same team.

### Homogeneous Ability Teams

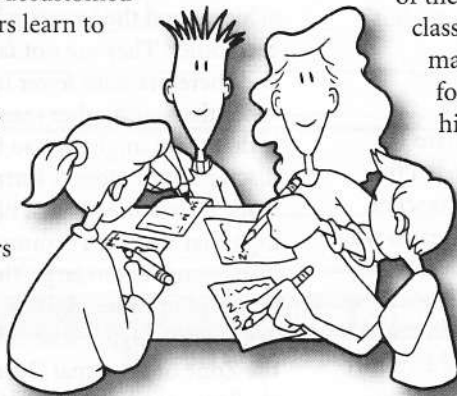
There are some advantages of allowing like-ability students to work together occasionally. In the heterogeneous team, we have the highest achiever and the lowest achiever sit across from each other. They are not face or shoulder partners and therefore have fewer interactions with each other than with other teammates. The rationale is that there might be too big of an ability level discrepancy. Students learn best when they work with someone at a higher level, but not so high that they don’t communicate well. If the discrepancy is too large, the lower achiever can’t keep up, and tunes out to avoid failure. Students at a slightly higher level offer stimulation in the Zone of Proximal Development. They challenge students to reach beyond their current achievement level. If the assistance is above or below the students’ zone, growth is limited. Homogeneous ability teams put students at approximately the same level together, so there is challenge at the appropriate level of difficulty. One caution with homogeneous teams, however: Growth is limited if students are too similar with regard to achievement. There is no challenge to take the next step forward.

**Differentiated Instruction.** Another plus of occasional use of homogeneous ability teams is facilitating differentiated instruction. With differentiated instruction, the teacher makes modifications of the curriculum or instruction to make the content more accessible. Differentiating instruction for a whole team at about the same ability level is much more manageable than trying to differentiate instruction for every student. There is a caution here too: There is a fine line between differentiation and within-class tracking. For this reason, homogeneous teams are only recommended on an occasional basis. And when used, the teacher operates under the motto: What’s good for the best, is good for the rest. Modifications and adaptations are made only if the task has proven too challenging, not before.

**A Two-Way Win.** If we have students only work in heterogeneous ability teams, then students miss out on opportunities to learn to be leaders and good teammates.

When all the high achievers are put on the same team, the team cannot function well if they all act as leaders. It's the classic case of too many generals and not enough soldiers. High achievers learn important life skills such as listening, reaching consensus, and making compromises. High achievers who are accustomed to being the team leaders learn to become team players.

The converse is true for low-ability students put together on the same team. Students who have been followers are now given an opportunity to step up. They learn leadership skills: how to communicate a message, and how to be assertive.



When the school year is done, will we be happy to know we have produced some good leaders and some good followers? No. We want all students to learn the important skills associated with each position. In life and in the workplace, our students will definitely find themselves in different roles at different times, and it is our job in education to prepare every student for the full spectrum of situations they will encounter.

Indeed, the occasional homogeneous ability team has advantages. But the advantages are bought at the expense of some major disadvantages, so we recommend homogeneous teams on an occasional basis only. How occasional is up to each teacher, but five to ten percent of the time is a good rule of thumb.



## Homogeneous Interest Teams

Students turn on to the curriculum when they are given choice and allowed to explore what interests them. Homogeneous interest teams can be used when writing research papers, doing a team project, or for a team presentation. Students with the same interests form a team to investigate their selected topic.

Interest teams usually revolve around a class theme, so the class is exploring different aspects of the same theme. For example, if the class is studying states, different teams may select different states as their focus. If the class is studying an historical event, such as the Civil War, teams could focus on different key historical persons such as Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Lee, Jackson, Tubman, and Douglass. If the class just read a story, each team may select a different literary element to explore: the setting, plot, characters, conflict, moral, and resolution. The class theme

can be broad: If the class is exploring the theme of discovery, one team can research inventions, another land discovery, and another medical breakthroughs.

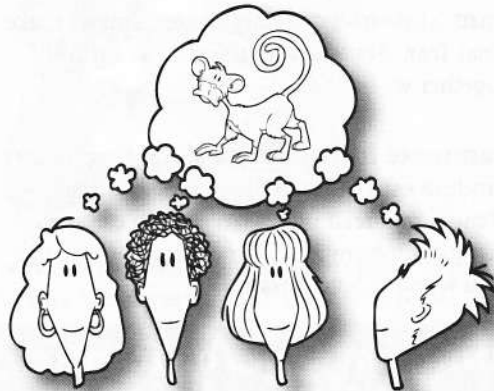
Interest teams can be used on a more regular basis than homogeneous ability teams without fostering negative stereotypes (We are the dummy team!). Students on interest teams share similar interests, but the teams will likely be mixed with regard to race, sex, and ability.





## Forming Interest Teams Corners and the Predetermined Selection

Corners is a great way to get students into their interest teams. The teacher posts options in the four corners of the classroom. If the class is studying animals, the teacher may post mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and birds in the four corners. Students first write down the number of the corner that most interests them, then go to that corner to form a team with other students in the same corner. The alternatives don't have to be four. The teacher can do Sides, and students choose between two alternatives. Or the teacher could post multiple alternatives. Note: In Corners, the teacher chooses the topics in advance and allows students to select from predetermined alternatives.



## Similarity Groups and the Open-Ended Selection

In Similarity Groups, students group by interests, but there are no predetermined options provided by the teacher. For example, if the class is studying mammals, students form teams based on different animals of interest. The students who want to study monkeys form a team. The students who want to study lions form a team. With Similarity Groups, students decide the topic of the interest team, not the teacher.

**Avoiding Friendship Selection.** The key to interest teams is for students to investigate what genuinely interests them. A potential problem is that when given the choice of teams, some students will invariably go to a team their friends are on regardless of their personal interests. To avoid this, have students write down their corner selection or topic of interest on a response board in large letters. After students go to their corners or form their similarity groups, have them hold up their response boards to verify they've followed their interest, not their friends.

## Homogeneous Language Teams

Limited English Proficient students, with different levels of English language proficiency, need different kinds of input—lower level students need more context and less cognitively demanding materials. Therefore, at certain points in the instructional cycle, and especially when there is a large range of language abilities and demanding content, teams based on English language ability are desirable, and the homogeneity principle should override the heterogeneity principle.

### Different Teams at Different Times

#### Teamformation and the Curricular Cycle

As teachers, we often follow a curricular cycle. First, we introduce a new, difficult concept or skill. Next, we offer guided practice on the skill, modeling and coaching, helping students work through their difficulties. Finally, when students have mastered the skill well enough, we have them practice the skill without mediation—we assign independent practice, either as homework or in class.

Teamformation interfaces with this curricular cycle. When we are first introducing a new, difficult concept, we want our students in heterogeneous teams. At this point in the cycle, if a student has a question, we want someone on the team who knows the answer or who can model and coach the skill. With a high achiever on each team, we have a greater probability of success. Later, once students have acquired the skill and need only to cement the skill with practice, we can afford to have students break out from their heterogeneous teams and work within random or student-selected teams. Random teams offer variety and an important meta-communication: We can work well with anyone.

Thus in some classrooms, students are in heterogeneous teams for the first part of the week as they learn and master new skills, and then break out into random teams for practice on Thursday before the Friday test.

## The Pros and Cons of Different Types of Teams

Each type of team has positives and negatives. The chart below summarizes the advantages and drawbacks of the four types of teams. On the whole, heterogeneous teams are the most effective teaming technique. But for the best of all worlds, we encourage the use of occasional, random, homogeneous, and student-selected teams.



### Parting Activities

Teams have been working together for six or so weeks. The teacher suddenly announces, "Tomorrow we will be forming new teams." The class is headed for trouble. Without closure, students are likely to spend the first couple of weeks in their new teams wishing they were in their old teams. Parting activities allow students to express their feelings and prepare emotionally for departing from the old team and joining a new team. Some favorite parting activities follow.

**Team Pictures.** Take a snapshot of teams before they part and post the photos, or have the teams paste them in the class scrapbook.

**Team Statements.** Have the teammates make a final Team Statement to the class as a team: "Together we learned...."

**Teammate Introductions.** Have teammates introduce each other to the class as exciting potential new teammates. "What you can really learn from Johnny is...." "One thing you will like about working with Susan is...."

### The Pros and Cons of Different Types of Teams

Team Type	Positives (+)	Negatives (-)
1 Heterogeneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balanced</li> <li>Maximum cross-race, cross-sex, and cross-ability contact</li> <li>Maximizes tutoring</li> <li>Management easier for equal ability level teams</li> <li>High achiever on each team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires teacher prep time</li> <li>Requires ranking and labeling students</li> <li>Limited contact between the high achievers</li> <li>Limited leadership opportunities for low achievers</li> </ul>
2 Random	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fair</li> <li>Side-steps labels and ranking</li> <li>No prior student knowledge necessary</li> <li>Classbuilding and networking opportunities</li> <li>Quick and easy</li> <li>Novelty, variety, fun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could form "winner" and "loser" teams</li> <li>Diversity not ensured</li> <li>Teams with friends, potential for off-task behavior</li> <li>Teams with enemies and conflicts</li> </ul>
3 Homogeneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership opportunities for low achievers</li> <li>Interaction opportunities for high achievers</li> <li>Opportunity for some high achievers to experience being a teammate, not leader</li> <li>High esteem for top groups</li> <li>Interest teams promote inquisitiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too-similar groups lack input in Zone of Proximal Development</li> <li>Negative stereotypes</li> <li>Poor self-esteem for low groups</li> <li>Lack of equity</li> <li>Difficult to manage class of teams at different ability levels</li> </ul>
4 Student-Selected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Novelty, variety, fun</li> <li>Familiarity</li> <li>Easy decision making and consensus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not balanced</li> <li>High potential for off-task behavior</li> </ul>

**Parting Messages.** Have students write a parting letter to each of their teammates. Emphasis is on “What I have learned from you,” “What I have enjoyed about working with you,” or “What I appreciate about you.” More sophisticated students can also deal with regrets. (See Parting Messages blackline on the next page.) See the box below for a Simultaneous RoundTable activity for parting messages.

### Parting Messages Activity

#### Simultaneous RoundTable

*We all have many partings throughout life; school can be a place where we learn to part with dignity and grace.*



- 1 Students each write their name at the top of a copy of the Parting Messages form. (Use colored paper when you copy the form.)
- 2 Students pass their Parting Message form to the person on their left within the team.
- 3 Each student writes a positive message to the person whose form they have.
- 4 Forms are passed and filled out until they return to the original sender.

### Team Reunions

Michael L. Bettino (Rolling Hills High School, Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District, CA) has a class with the following ethnic makeup: eight Anglo American, four Persian, four Japanese, three Chinese, two Indian (from India), one French, one Canadian, and one South American student. They instituted Team Reunions as follows:

*“After six weeks of heterogeneous groups in an 11th grade regular English III class (American Literature and Composition), it was time to*

*make new groups. I made the changes and found a certain amount of hostility to the new groups. A student asked if they could have a five minute ‘Group Reunion.’*

*I let them do this—and then they returned to their new groups. Now the new groups are rolling along very smoothly.*

*A new Group Reunion will take place in two weeks and will be a regular part of the program.”*

The Team Reunion well might be used in any class to have an old team become an ongoing support group for students. As students discuss with their old teammates how things are going in their new teams, they might gain support as well as insights not otherwise possible.



## Chapter Summary

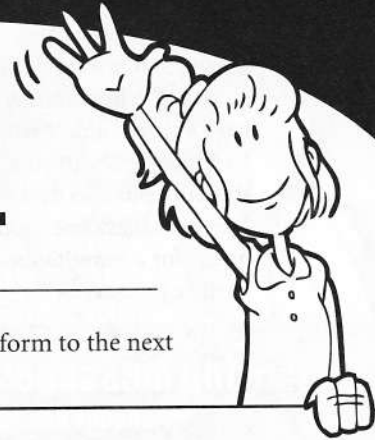
Teamwork is a defining characteristic of cooperative learning. In the cooperative learning classroom, students sit in teams and work with teammates to master and deepen their thinking about the curriculum, create cooperative projects, and plan collaborative presentations.

The ideal team size is four students. Teams of four are large enough to unleash synergy; yet, teams of four are small enough to keep every student actively engaged. Teams of four offer many grouping options within the team—twice as many as teams of three. Importantly, teams of four break evenly into pairs for frequent pair work.

There are four major types of teams. We recommend students spend most of their time in *heterogeneous teams*. The heterogeneous team is a mirror of the diversity in the classroom containing males and females, students of different races, and students at all levels of achievement. Heterogeneous teams allow peer tutoring, increasing achievement, and allow positive interaction among students of all backgrounds, improving race relations.



# Parting Messages For...



Teammate Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions.** Write a special message to your teammate in one box, then pass the form to the next teammate. After everyone has written a message, give the form to your teammate.

I appreciate you because... \_\_\_\_\_

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From \_\_\_\_\_

I appreciate you because... \_\_\_\_\_

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From \_\_\_\_\_

I appreciate you because... \_\_\_\_\_

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From \_\_\_\_\_

I appreciate you because... \_\_\_\_\_

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From \_\_\_\_\_

The second type of team: *random teams*. Random teams do not take student characteristics into account. Random teams add excitement to the classroom. We recommend random teams as an occasional break-out from heterogeneous teams. Students have the opportunity to work with classmates outside of their team. Because random teams are not balanced and do not maximize either achievement potential or potential to improve race relations, we recommend they be used only for short-term interactions.

The third type of team: *student-selected teams*. Occasional use of student-selected teams allows students to work with those they already know and like. Working with friends can make academics more pleasurable. Again, we recommend student-selected teams for short-term activities and projects.

The fourth type of team: *homogeneous teams*. Homogeneous teams place students with the same or similar characteristics on the same team. Students can be the same sex, at similar ability levels, speak the same language, or share similar interests. Homogeneous ability teams give students the opportunity to work with

others at their academic level which allows us to differentiate the curriculum for teams. We must be careful not to overuse same-ability teams as they are a form of within-class tracking undermining motivation of lower achieving students. One form or homogeneous team, the interest team, allows students to choose what they wish to investigate and pursue common interests; they are brain-friendly and motivational.

We encourage using the many types of teams to group and regroup students. We want our students to thrive in diversity—to work productively with others like and unlike them, just as they will need to do to succeed in an increasingly diverse and interdependent world. While all types of teams are good for frequent break-out activities and projects, students should spend the majority of their time in heterogeneous teams. Heterogeneous teams are research-based; sidestep the damaging effects of tracking; reduce the achievement gap; promote diversity and bonding with others of different sexes, abilities, interests; reduce racial tensions; and contribute to a more harmonious and pluralistic society.



## Chapter Questions

### ► Questions for Review

1. What are the four main types of cooperative teams?
2. Why are teams of four the best team size?
3. How would you describe the basic cooperative learning base team?
4. Heterogeneous teams are mixed along several dimensions. What are the dimensions?
5. How can you keep students from forming friendship teams when you want them to team up by interests?

### ► Questions for Thinking and Discussion

1. On a philosophical level, do you think heterogeneous teams or homogeneous teams are more appropriate for the classroom? Why?
2. What kind of class would benefit most from heterogeneous teams? When would random teams and interest teams be most useful?
3. What types of teams will you use in your classroom? How will you use them? For how long?
4. Do you think it is a good idea to allow students to form their own teams the first week of school? Why or why not?
5. How can we do differentiated instruction without creating within-class tracking?
6. If all classrooms used heterogeneous teams, we could drastically improve the race relations that plague our society. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.