

Student engagement strategies

This document organizes a range of K–5 student engagement strategies according to [Fisher and Frey's Gradual Release of Responsibility](#) (GRR) model, which shows how responsibility for learning shifts from teacher to student through four phases: *I do it*, *We do it*, *You do it together*, and *You do it alone*. While the strategies are grouped by the phase in which they are most commonly used, many are flexible and can be adapted across phases based on lesson goals and the level of support students need. Within each section, strategies are listed in no particular order.

When selecting an engagement technique, consider where you are in the lesson and the primary focus of instruction. Different strategies serve different purposes—some help activate prior knowledge, others support guided practice, and others promote independent application. Choosing intentionally ensures that student engagement aligns with the learning goal and supports meaningful participation at every stage of instruction.

Teaching students to use any instructional routine effectively requires explicit modeling and guided practice with feedback. Begin with modeling to show what the routine looks and sounds like, then provide opportunities for students to practice with clear expectations and ongoing support.

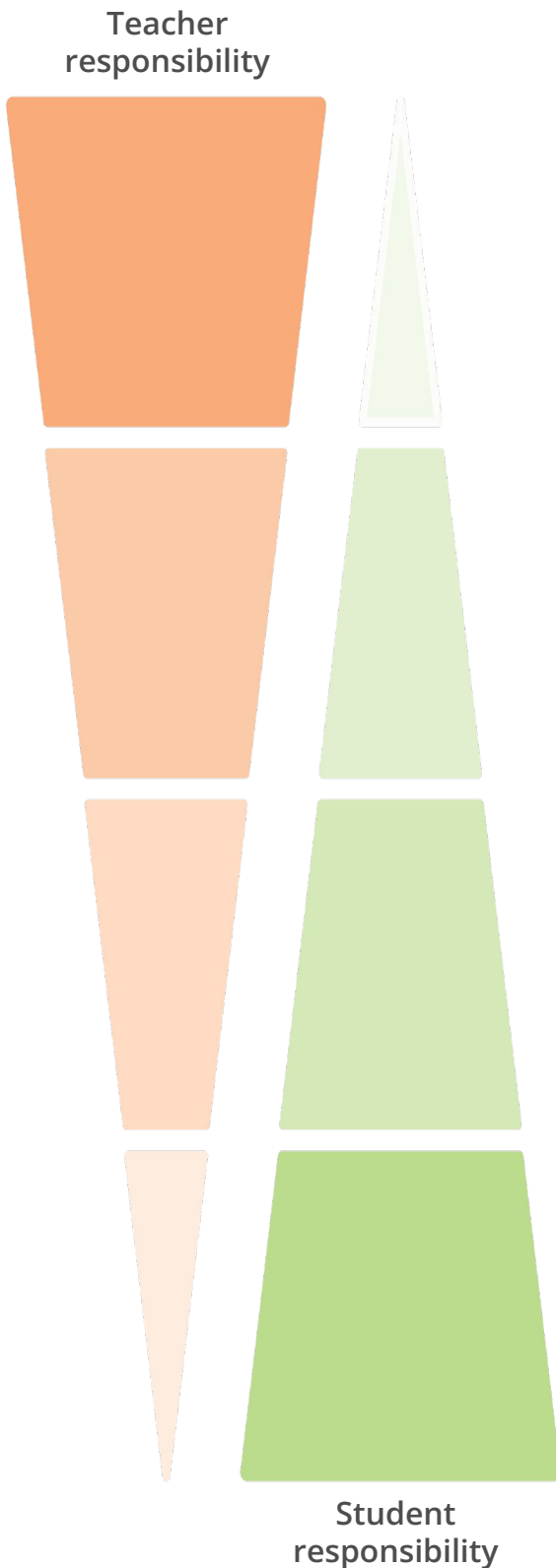
Strategy	Description	How to ...
I do it — Teacher modeling and direct support <i>The teacher models or demonstrates new learning while students observe and begin to engage in structured ways.</i>		
Teacher modeling	The teacher explicitly demonstrates a skill or process while thinking aloud to make their reasoning visible.	Identify the target skill or concept, model it step-by-step, and explicitly verbalize the thinking process. Invite students to notice and name key actions or reasoning.
<i>These strategies engage all students in quick responses that tend to be low-stakes and support the transition from the I do it to the We do it phase.</i>		
Chorale response	All students respond together to a teacher prompt (word, sound, or phrase).	Pose a clear, concise prompt and signal when to respond. Use for quick checks for understanding, recall, or skill practice (e.g., vocabulary, phonics).
Call and response/signals	The teacher “calls” with a phrase or cue, and students “respond” with a predetermined verbal or non-verbal signal.	Use to maintain engagement, signal transitions, or regain attention.
Interactive read-aloud	The teacher reads aloud and pauses for discussion, prediction, or connection-making.	Preselect stopping points and prompts; encourage students to share brief thoughts or non-verbal gestures (see below) to show understanding.

Strategy	Description	How to ...
Quick poll	Students respond to a question by showing their answer in a quick, visible way, such as raising hands, holding up cards, or using digital tools.	Pose a concise question. Provide response options and a clear way for students to indicate their choice. Scan responses to gauge understanding and address misconceptions before moving on.
Round robin	Students take turns sharing ideas or responses one at a time within a small group.	Organize students into small groups. Pose a question or prompt and set a time limit for each turn. Have students share responses in order, while others listen without interrupting.
Whip around/quick share	Each student shares a brief response (a word or phrase) in turn.	Pose an open-ended question. Go around the room or call on a set number of students for a quick answer.
<p>We do it — Guided practice and shared responsibility <i>Students work with peers to apply skills and deepen understanding. The teacher facilitates, monitors, and provides feedback as students practice together. Students can also share their partner or group responses with the class to extend learning and build collective understanding.</i></p>		
Think-pair-share	Students think individually, discuss with a partner, and share with the class.	Pose a clear prompt. Allow time for individual thinking and partner discussion, then invite a few pairs to share their ideas with the class. You can use a “stand up, hand up, pair up” routine to get students more active and help them quickly find a partner to begin discussing.
Think-pair-write	Students think individually, discuss with a partner, and then write a brief response before sharing with the class.	Pose a prompt. Allow time to think, discuss with a partner, then write a short response capturing their own or their partner’s idea. Invite a few students or pairs to share with the class.
Turn and talk	Partners quickly discuss a question or idea to process learning.	Prepare a specific prompt and assign partners. Signal when to start and when to return to whole group.
Numbered heads together	Students discuss a question in groups, then one randomly selected student shares for the team.	Assign numbers within groups. Pose a question, allow group discussion, then randomly call a number to share on behalf of the group.

Strategy	Description	How to ...
<p>You do it together — Collaborative practice and application <i>Students work with peers to apply skills and strategies, supporting each other's learning through collaboration. The teacher steps back, monitors progress, and provides feedback as needed.</i></p>		
Peer teaching	Students explain or practice concepts with a partner or small group.	Model how to give feedback and coach peers. Assign clear roles (e.g., reader/listener, coach/student).
Jigsaw	Students work collaboratively to become experts on different aspects of a topic and then teach their peers, allowing the group to build a complete understanding together.	Divide the class into expert groups, each focusing on one aspect of the topic. After mastering their part, form new "jigsaw" groups with one member from each expert group. Students share their learning so the group can combine knowledge to complete a task or project.
Partner reading	Students read a shared text aloud, alternating or echoing each other to build fluency and comprehension.	Model how to read and listen actively. Pair students strategically and assign reading roles or routines (e.g., alternating paragraphs, echo reading).
Collaborative problem solving	Students work together to apply knowledge to a shared task or challenge.	Present a clear problem and outline goals. Provide tools or materials and encourage reasoning, justification, and shared decision-making.
Gallery walk	Students move around the room to view and comment on peers' work or posted materials.	Display work or visuals around the room. Provide guiding questions or sticky notes for feedback.
Four corners	Students move to a designated corner that represents their opinion or choice.	Label each corner with an option. Present a prompt or statement, allow movement, and have corner groups discuss reasoning before sharing out.

Strategy	Description	How to ...
<p>You do it alone — Independent practice and application <i>Students apply skills and strategies on their own, without peer support, demonstrating full ownership of their learning. The teacher monitors progress and provides feedback as needed.</i></p>		
<p>Socratic seminar/discussion circles</p>	<p>Students lead a discussion using evidence and reasoning, while the teacher facilitates.</p>	<p>Teach students how to prepare discussion questions, cite evidence from a text, and listen actively. Begin with small groups if new and increase independence over time.</p> <p>For K-2: Involve students in developing discussion norms that emphasize inquiry and building on one another's ideas. Begin with short, structured discussions and provide sentence stems (e.g., "I wonder why..." or "I agree/disagree with ___ because..."). Model how to take turns and use visual cues or talking objects to support active listening. Gradually increase the length and complexity of discussions as students gain confidence and independence.</p>
<p>Fishbowl</p>	<p>A small group of students sits in an inner circle (the "fishbowl") to discuss a topic, model a routine, or solve a problem while the rest of the class observes from an outer circle.</p>	<p>Arrange seats in two circles—a small inner circle and a larger outer circle. Explain that the inner group will discuss or solve a problem while others observe using a checklist or focus question. Afterward, have observers share what they noticed, then rotate roles so everyone participates.</p>
<p>Learning stations</p>	<p>Students rotate through or select from a set of independent tasks to practice or extend learning.</p>	<p>Design tasks aligned to learning goals. Model expectations, time management, and accountability procedures before release.</p>
<p>Independent writing or journaling</p>	<p>Students write independently to apply content knowledge, reflect on learning, or express ideas.</p>	<p>Provide a clear prompt and success criteria. Encourage students to review and revise before sharing or submitting.</p>

Strategies at a glance



I do it

- Teacher modeling
- Call and response/signals
- Quick poll
- Round robin
- Chorale response
- Interactive read-aloud
- Whip around/quick share

We do it

- Think-pair-share
- Numbered heads together
- Think-pair-write
- Turn and talk

You do it together

- Peer teaching
- Partner reading
- Gallery walk
- Four corners
- Jigsaw
- Collaborative problem solving

You do it alone

- Socratic seminar/discussion circles
- Fishbowl
- Learning stations
- Independent writing or journaling

Strategies are listed in no particular order within each section.