

# Turn and Talk: An Evidence-Based Practice Teacher's Guide

---

Authors: Alicia A. Stewart and Elizabeth Swanson



---

**PACT**  **PLUS**

PROMOTING ADOLESCENTS' COMPREHENSION OF TEXT

---

## Preferred Citation

Stewart, A. A., & Swanson, E. (2019). *Turn and talk: An evidence-based practice. Teacher's guide*. Austin, TX: The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk.

This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Education through Grant H326M150016 to The University of Texas at Austin and the University of Maryland. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the U.S. Department of Education.



© 2019 The University of Texas at Austin/The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

For inquiries about using this product outside the scope of this license, contact

[licensing@meadowscenter.org](mailto:licensing@meadowscenter.org)

# What Is Turn and Talk?

Turn and talk is an instructional routine in which students use content knowledge during a brief conversation with a peer. Students are provided with a short prompt to discuss content or a skill. Students turn to their predetermined partner and answer the prompt while their partner listens. Then, the partners switch roles to allow the second student to address the prompt.

Prompts can have a variety of purposes, including the following:

- Applying content to students' lives, creating meaningful connections
- Practicing a discrete skill, such as explaining text evidence to support an argument
- Brainstorming to access background knowledge
- Answering a question related to key content

The turn-and-talk routine can be used across all content areas and at any grade level.

Scan the QR code below to access a video in which a seventh-grade science teacher talks about how he uses the turn-and-talk routine in his classroom.



Seventh-Grade Turn and Talk  
([www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/turn-and-talk](http://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/turn-and-talk))

## Is It Effective?

The turn-and-talk routine increases students' opportunities to respond. In traditional classrooms, the teacher asks a question and one student answers. When teachers use the turn-and-talk routine instead, all students have an opportunity to answer questions or discuss key content. Research shows that having multiple opportunities to respond and actively engage in content learning improves student learning (MacSuga-Gage & Simonsen, 2015).

The routine is a form of collaborative learning that promotes the use of new content in conversation to improve expressive language skills (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Jones, Levin, Levin, & Beitzel, 2000). Improving students' expressive language can also strengthen their linguistic comprehension, which is necessary to comprehend text (Tunmer & Chapman, 2012).

When combined with effective vocabulary and reading comprehension instruction, the turn-and-talk routine has been shown to improve vocabulary knowledge and content knowledge (e.g., Swanson et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2015; Vaughn et al., 2013; Wanzek, Swanson, Roberts, Vaughn, & Kent, 2015).

Teachers report that when they use the turn-and-talk routine, their students are more engaged. Structured partner work can also increase on-task behavior for students who struggle to sustain attention and focus in the classroom (e.g., Locke & Fuchs, 1995).

## The Routine

The turn-and-talk routine consists of three basic steps. First, the teacher provides students with a brief prompt or question. Second, one student verbally answers the prompt while the second student listens. Third, the roles are reversed, and the second student answers the prompt while the first student listens.

### Step 1: Provide a prompt.

The teacher provides a brief written or spoken prompt.

### Step 2: Partner 1 answers.

Partner 1 responds to the prompt while Partner 2 listens.

### Step 3: Partner 2 answers.

Partner 2 responds to the prompt while Partner 1 listens.

## Pairing Students

Teachers may pair students in various ways. The most important thing to consider is which students will be most successful at staying on task during the brief turn-and-talk exchanges. Some teachers may pair students based on geographical convenience (e.g., students turn and talk to their neighbor). Other teachers might pair students based on student behavior. If teachers already have pairs set up for other activities (e.g., collaborative learning pairs, partner reading), they can use these established pairs during the turn-and-talk routine.

The following are general guidelines for student pairing:

- Seat students who are respectful to each other side by side.
- Seat struggling learners next to students who are supportive.
- Seat less proficient English language learners next to more proficient English language learners.

## The Importance of Modeling

Teaching students how to use any instructional routine requires teacher modeling and guided practice with feedback. Instruction should begin with modeling to show students what the turn-and-talk routine looks like and sounds like. Teachers should also establish clear expectations, such as those shown below.

### When you turn and talk to a partner, remember to...

- Tell your partner your answer in one to two sentences.
- Listen without interrupting while your partner tells you their answer.
- Be kind and supportive so everyone feels comfortable sharing their answers.

After teacher modeling, students will be able to use the turn-and-talk routine with a small amount of teacher direction. Eventually, the teacher can simply prompt students to complete the turn-and-talk routine independently.

The following pages provide an example lesson that uses the turn-and-talk routine, complete with suggested teacher scripting and directives.

# Example Lesson: Using the Routine in Vocabulary Instruction

## Objective

Students will learn the steps of the turn-and-talk routine.

## Materials

- Explicit vocabulary instruction guide (see example at right)
- Written turn-and-talk prompts for each word

## Introduction

Today we will learn the turn-and-talk routine. This is a way for everyone in the class to answer key questions. We will use this routine a lot, so I want you to understand what I expect from you.

Let me show you what it looks like.

## Teacher Modeling

*Ask two students to join you in the front of the room.*

Today, [student's name] will be Partner 1 and [student's name] will be Partner 2.

There are three steps to turn and talk:

1. I will give you a prompt.
2. Partner 1 will respond while Partner 2 listens.
3. Partner 2 will respond while Partner 1 listens.

When I ring the bell, time is up, and I want attention back on me.

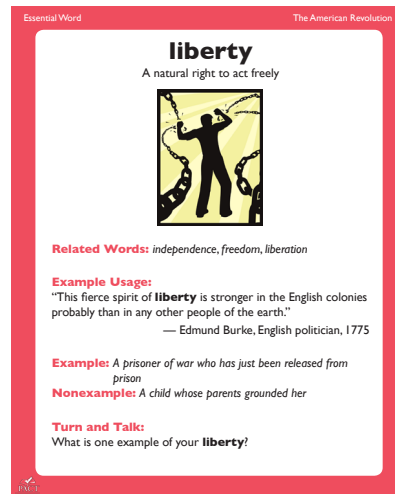
Let's try it. Here is the prompt: Turn to your partner and say what you had for lunch today. I want you to say, "For lunch today, I had ..." Partner 1, you go first, and then Partner 2, you can answer.

*After students have worked, ring the bell and give your attention prompt.*

Let's try another prompt. Turn to your partner and name one thing you noticed on your way to school today. I want you to say, "On my way to school, I saw a ..." Partner 2, this time, you go first, and then Partner 1, you can answer.

*After students have worked, ring the bell and give your attention prompt.*

That was great. I appreciate the way you followed the procedure. Thank you.



## Guided Practice

Now we will practice together.

*Go around the room and partner students. Be explicit. Look at each pair of students and say, "You two are partners. You're Partner 1, and you're Partner 2."*

If you are Partner 1, raise your hand. Good.

If you are Partner 2, raise your hand. Good.

We have been learning about the concept of liberty. We know that it means a natural right to act freely. Now let's think of examples of liberty in your life. Turn to your partner and answer this question: What is one example of your liberty?

Partner 1, you answer first. Then, Partner 2, you can answer.

*After students have worked, ring the bell and give your attention prompt.*

*Ask a few pairs to share what they discussed.*

I liked several things about your discussions.

*Name one or two things that you noticed students did well.*

**Note:** Depending on the success of the routine, you may need to stay in the guided practice phase for a few turn-and-talk episodes. Move into independent practice only when students perform the routine perfectly with your guidance.

## Independent Practice

*Use prompts to guide students' independent use of the turn-and-talk routine. Keep the prompts short and explanatory, such as the following.*

Time for turn and talk. Answer this question.

*Read the question.*

Begin.

*The following is another example of a simple prompt.*

Turn to your shoulder partner and discuss this question.

*Read the question.*

Partner 1, you go first.

# Common Challenges and Solutions

Challenges often arise when using the turn-and-talk routine. Sometimes, one partner talks the whole time, leaving no opportunity for the other student. On some days, both partners are silent. Sometimes, students chat about their day, and other times, one partner pays no attention to the other.

Below are some common challenges when implementing the turn-and-talk routine paired with solutions to consider. Though the list is not exhaustive, it is based on other teachers' experience.

Challenge	Solutions to Consider
One student talks too long and monopolizes the turn-and-talk sessions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before the next time using the routine, review the expectation that each person should answer in one to two sentences.</li> <li>• Use a timer so that each partner gets the same time to respond.</li> </ul>
You notice a lot of off-task chatter.	<p><b>Incentivize on-task discussion:</b> Announce that you will introduce a challenge. You will walk around, listening to groups. For every person that is on task, the class earns a point toward a reward.</p>
A student with limited English proficiency struggles to participate in discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pair the student with an English language learner who is more proficient with English.</li> <li>• Ask the more proficient English language learner to speak in their native language as needed while also helping their partner learn a new word or two in English each day.</li> </ul>
You notice that some students are not paying attention to their partner.	<p><b>Promote active listening and respectful communication:</b> Tell students to listen carefully to their partners and to share what their partner said. Students can share in various ways, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask students to write what their partner said on an exit ticket and submit it to you at the end of the lesson.</li> <li>• Check in with a few pairs so they can tell you what their partner said.</li> <li>• Call on a few students to share what was discussed.</li> </ul>



## References

- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Jones, M. S., Levin, M. E., Levin, J. R., & Beitzel, B. D. (2000). Can vocabulary-learning strategies and pair-learning formats be profitably combined? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*, 256–262. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.92.2.256
- Locke, W. R., & Fuchs, L. S. (1995). Effects of peer-mediated reading instruction on the on-task behavior and social interaction of children with behavior disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 3*, 92–99. doi:10.1177/106342669500300204
- MacSuga-Gage, A. S., & Simonsen, B. (2015). Examining the effects of teacher-directed opportunities to respond on student outcomes: A systematic review of the literature. *Education and Treatment of Children, 38*(2), 211–239.
- Swanson, E. A., Wanzek, J., Vaughn, S., Fall, A.-M., Roberts, G., Hall, C., & Miller, V. (2017). Middle school reading comprehension and content learning intervention for below-average readers. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 33*, 37–53. doi:10.1080/10573569.2015.102068
- Tunmer, W. E., & Chapman, J. W. (2012). The simple view of reading redux: Vocabulary knowledge and the independent components hypothesis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 45*, 453–466. doi:10.1177/0022219411432685
- Vaughn, S., Martinez, L. R., Wanzek, J., Roberts, G., Swanson, E. A., & Fall, A.-M. (2017). Improving content knowledge and comprehension for English language learners: Findings from a randomized control trial. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*, 22–34. doi:10.1037/edu0000069
- Vaughn, S., Roberts, G., Swanson, E. A., Wanzek, J., Fall, A.-M., & Stillman-Spisak, S. (2015). Improving middle-school students' knowledge and comprehension in social studies: A replication. *Educational Psychology Review, 27*, 31–50. doi:10.107/s10648-014-9274-2
- Vaughn, S., Swanson, E. A., Roberts, G., Wanzek, J., Stillman-Spisak, S., Solis, M., & Simmons, D. (2013). Improving reading comprehension and social studies knowledge in middle school. *Reading Research Quarterly, 48*, 77–93. doi:10.1002/rrq.039
- Wanzek, J., Swanson, E., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., & Kent, S. C. (2015). Promoting acceleration of comprehension and content through text in high school social studies classes. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness, 8*, 169–188. doi:10.1080/19345747.2014.906011

