

## A Dozen Surefire Tips on Flexible Grouping and Small Group Learning

Group work is traditionally fraught with challenges. Will students do their fair share? Will they behave appropriately? Will learning be effective and efficient enough to meet the achievement challenge? Research indicates that cooperative learning increases achievement. How can we foster that result? Here are a dozen things to consider when setting up and implementing independent and small-group activities:



1. Provide instruction and activities for students of varying skill levels.
2. Assess student progress frequently by monitoring student work and error patterns to identify information that needs to be re-taught.
3. Avoid using worksheets as the primary focus of small-group work. Worksheets should be kept to a minimum, if not eliminated altogether.
4. Establish, model, and practice clear routines for students to follow. Rehearse the expectations and review expectations frequently.
5. Notice positive group behavior. Research indicates that teachers should give students more positive comments than negative comments.
6. Calmly, quietly, and quickly approach and redirect students who are off task. Use a nonverbal cue or a cue card (see cue card example).
7. Use proximity control. The co-teaching environment makes this much more doable.
8. Use assessment data to create lesson plans and determine your groups.
9. Keep groups small, preferably three to four students to a group. Sometimes it might even be appropriate to have pairs.
10. Change groups as students grow or test out of a curriculum section.
11. Describe, show an example, or model the expectations for assignments and activities as well as examples of what the outcome should, and should not, look like.
12. Correct misbehavior and teach appropriate behavior and expectations (we cannot assume that students know what to do).