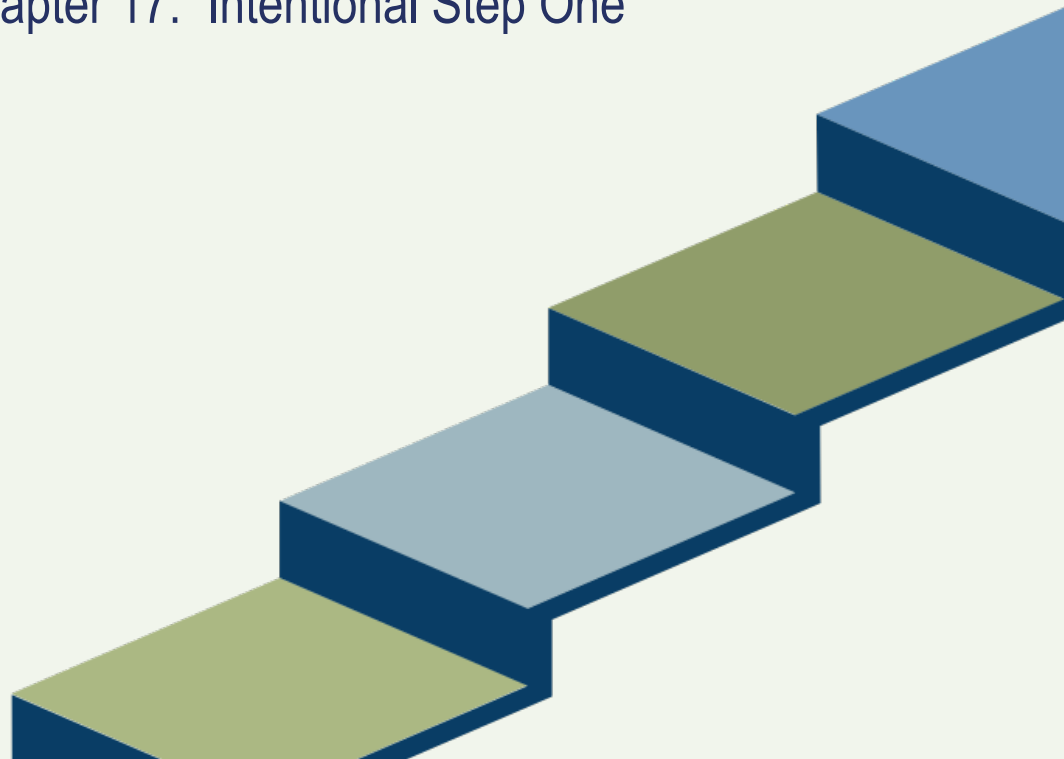


# Intentional Instructional Moves

Strategic Steps to  
Accelerate Student  
Learning

## Companion Guide

Chapter 17: Intentional Step One



## Chapter 17

### Intentional Step One: Get Students Talking

If teachers are new to the practice of student discourse, they can start small by adding a few discussion strategies to their lessons, and gradually build up to longer, more student-directed conversations. Pair-shares and Turn-and-Talks are effective activities that get students talking to one another and can usually be slotted into lessons easily. Be sure to teach students about the communication skills they will need during a discussion and why these traits are valuable. Teachers should also model appropriate behaviors, such as how to take turns when speaking or how to listen attentively. Finally, leave time for reflection at the end of a discussion. It can be easy to skip over this step, but giving students time to reflect and self-assess will help them process their learning and set goals to improve.

Additionally, teachers can perform a self-assessment of their classroom and current practices. For instance, they might ask:

- Does my classroom discourse emphasize getting the right answer, or does it focus on the learning process and learning strategies?
- Are verbal interactions predominantly teacher-to-student and student-to-teacher?
- How many students regularly contribute to discussions? Are some students reluctant to contribute?
- Do I offer opportunities for student-led discourse?
- Do I model effective discussion techniques, such as wait time, body language, and active listening?
- How many open-ended questions do I ask? How many close-ended?

## Strategy 1: Pre-Discussion Prompts

Before beginning a whole class or small group discussion, write several pre-discussion prompts on the board or provide them on a handout. These questions might include:

- What interests you about this topic?
- What questions do you have about the topic?
- What personal connections do you have to the topic?
- What connections do you see between this topic and another topic we've discussed?
- What predictions can you make about the topic?

Asking students to think about the topic before they discuss gives them time to prepare for the activity. It invites them to think of answers ahead of time so that when the discussion begins, they will already have ideas to share and won't have to come up with them on the spot. More time to think also encourages students to practice critical thinking, reasoning, and analysis. Pre-discussion prompts can be helpful for more reluctant students and diverse learners. They can also help teachers start with more surface-level questions and build toward higher-order thinking and deeper levels of questioning, or problem-solving teaching (.68).

## Strategy 2: Sharing Time

Show and Tell is a more common activity in early elementary classrooms, but if adapted appropriately, this strategy can work for all grade levels. In practice, this exercise is really just an opportunity for students to share something that interests them and talk about it in front of their peers. Teachers can incorporate Sharing Time into morning meetings, at the beginning or end of class, or during other transitional periods throughout the day.

To enhance the practice of Sharing Time, teachers should establish a clear purpose and routine for the sharing. They can also model how students should present their information and how audience members should behave. For instance, the teacher can ask questions of the presenter, make comments, and restate what the speaker has shared. The teacher can also talk with students about how to tell a story and present information more effectively (see Chapter 16). In elementary classes, Sharing Time might involve a student bringing in photos of a pet and explaining how to care for the animal, or a copy of a family recipe and describing/demonstrating how to make the dish. In middle and high school, teachers can increase the complexity of the task by asking students to tackle more challenging subjects and support their talks with evidence and/or visual aids. To keep audience members engaged, teachers can ask students to reflect on the topic by writing in a journal and/or having a brief discussion after the student finishes sharing.

These brief presentations help students cultivate communication skills in a less formal environment. They are encouraged to talk about something that interests them and share their knowledge with the class. Likewise, the audience gets to listen to an “expert” teach them about something new. It’s always beneficial to tap into the vast “funds of knowledge” our students possess, especially as our classrooms become more diverse (Grifenhagen & Barnes, 2022, para. 5). Students can share information about their families, community, culture, and passions, which helps expose other learners to a wide range of topics. Students will also get to practice skills like presenting, description, sequencing, questioning, answering, and linking relevant ideas. Sharing is a form of cooperative learning (.55) that taps into students’ creativity and social influence.

### Strategy 3: Write it Down

Discussions don't always happen out loud. Give students opportunities to write down their thoughts and share them with a peer or small group. For example, students might take several minutes to write down their responses to a question. The teacher can instruct them to write down a complete thought, rather than just a word or two, so students are encouraged to think through what they want to say and how to say it. Then, they will turn to a peer and read what they have written. Alternatively, they can hand their paper to another student and that student will read and discuss the written response.

Sometimes, students are more comfortable writing their answers than speaking them out loud. For other students, the opposite might be true. This strategy helps all students practice different ways of communicating and reflecting on their ideas. It also incorporates summarization (.79) and peer-feedback (.70). Written responses create additional opportunities for students to practice critical thinking, analysis, and active learning.