

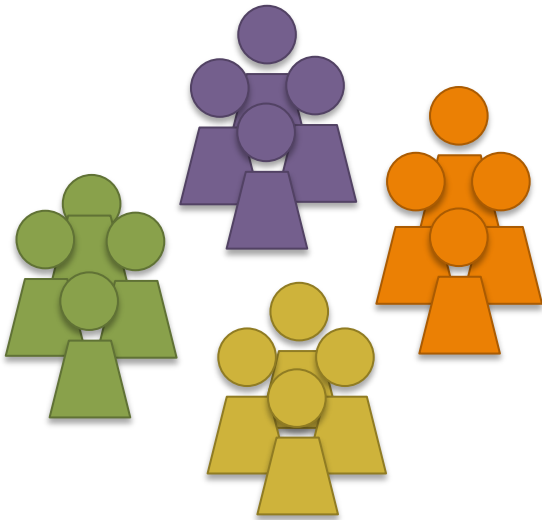
# A Carousel Activity

## For Student-driven Group Discussion

The Carousel Activity is a group discussion strategy that achieves a breadth and depth that can otherwise be missed in whole-class discussion. Student groups discuss the assigned material, and prepare to present it to their classmates. Then, students form new groups, in which each of the previous groups is represented by at least one member. Within these new groups, students share and discuss their findings, and serve as “experts” on the particular topic or example to which they were originally assigned.

### Discussion: Round 1

Each group discusses a particular topic, becoming “experts” in that topic.



### Discussion: Round 2

Experts from each topic meet with one expert on a different topic, and report their findings.



Review one faculty’s experience  
with this activity, along with  
possible variations at  
**[oakland.edu/teachingtips](http://oakland.edu/teachingtips)**

# Carousel Activity

**Type of Strategy:** In-class strategy for active learning

**Purpose, Goals or Learning Outcomes for Strategy:**

- Students process and synthesize information independently.
- By presenting their findings to others, students take ownership of the material they have learned.
- Students have a chance to work in-depth with a single topic or example, but then are exposed to several others as well.

**Type of Course:** I've used versions of this activity for classes at all levels, from undergraduate to graduate, and it could potentially be integrated into a wide range of different teaching formats.

**Typical Number of Students in Course:** 35

**Ease with which strategy could be modified and/or applied to other courses:** Easy

**Brief Overview of Strategy:** Students work in groups, with each group assigned to a different topic or example. First, they discuss the material assigned to their group, and prepare to present it to their classmates. Then, students form new groups, in which each of the previous groups is represented by at least one member. Within these new groups, students share and discuss their findings, and serve as "experts" on the particular topic or example to which they were originally assigned.

**Step-by-Step Instructions of Strategy:**

1. Decide on the topics that will be covered in the activity, and prepare any supplementary materials that will need to be distributed to students.
2. (*Optional*) Assign students to groups ahead of time, and inform them of the topic their group will be discussing in the following class. Ask them to prepare by reading an assigned text, researching, or preparing notes on that topic.
3. In class, break students into groups. (The size of these groups can vary from as few as 3 to as many as ten students, depending on the size of the class and the number of topics to be covered. In a large class where few topics will be covered, these groups can also be subdivided at this stage.) Give students time to discuss their assigned topic together, and instruct them that each member of the group will need to be prepared to summarize the group's findings when they are done.

4. Form students into new groups; these new groups will contain at least one member who was assigned to each of the original topics. (If attendance is consistent, you can construct these groups in advance. If not, you will have to improvise.) Instruct students to share what they discussed in their previous groups, and answer any questions their classmates might have. By the time this phase of the discussion is complete, each student will have in-depth knowledge of one topic or example, and be familiar with all of them in a general way.

**Additional Comments:**

I've used this activity to carry out detailed analysis of literary texts, assigning the same set of questions to all the groups, but tasking each to focus on a different character or section of the text. I've also used it to bring in additional examples when a subject was too broad to cover in our assigned readings (for instance, to bring in many different examples of feminist literary criticism). This strategy could also work well to provide an overview of divergent theoretical positions, or to present a range of case-studies to illustrate a larger point.

I especially appreciate the way this activity balances breadth and depth. Also, the fact that each student will be responsible for sharing the findings of their original group (rather than relying on a single group "secretary" or "reporter") encourages accountability, and prevents students from taking a purely passive role.

**Resources** Thanks to the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan, and particularly their Preparing Future Faculty summer institute, in which I first learned about this strategy.

**Name of course in which the strategy is being implemented:** English 303: Fiction

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