



Throughout a project—particularly during the build knowledge and develop and critique phases—students are engaged in extended work time to complete project tasks. This work time should focus on learning and application of key knowledge, understanding and success skills, and should support student development of the project product(s). There are a number of strategies and approaches you can leverage during work time in order to make sure that it is purposeful and is centered on student learning.

## WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Well-structured work time, with a balance of flexibility and accountability, is critical to successful Project Based Learning. Providing time for students to work on their products or project tasks allows them to own their learning and to engage deeply with one another and their work. However, it's also important to provide enough structure and support that students stay focused and are actually learning throughout each class period.



## WHAT DO I DO?



**The following approaches can help you ensure that students are fully engaged in meaningful and productive learning experiences throughout work time. Consider mixing and matching these approaches in your classroom depending on where you are in the project and the needs of your students.**

### Teacher-Led Mini-Workshops

While the class is engaged in project work, you may wish to offer a selection of instructional “mini-workshops” that focus on particular topics to a smaller group of students. These mini-workshops focus on teaching or reteaching targeted content or skills. You can organize groups for mini-workshops in a variety of ways, depending on the concept or skill you are teaching and the needs of your students:

GROUPING APPROACH	DESCRIPTION
Student Choice	Students “opt-in” to a mini-workshop based on their self-identified need or interest in a given topic.
Teacher-Selected Groups Based on Student Need	Identify students who may need additional support, remediation, or extension related to a particular concept or skill and then work with those students.
Role-Alike Groups	A representative from each project team (based on student roles) attends a role-specific mini-workshop and then shares key concepts with the representative's home team.
Project Teams	You conduct a mini-workshop with an individual project team, based on the particular content or skills the team needs.
Formative Assessment	Using the results of a formative assessment, bring together specific students who have the same need regarding key content or skills.



## Teacher Conferences

Work time offers an important opportunity for teachers to confer formally or informally with individual students or project teams. You may find it useful to follow a predictable format during these coaching opportunities:

CONFERENCE STEPS	WHAT TO DO	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
1. Check-In and Formative Assessment	Use conversation and observation to gauge where students are in their work. Make note of what's going well, as well as where students are struggling or may need to be redirected. Ask lots of questions during this phase of the conference.	<p>"What can you tell me about the decisions you made here?"</p> <p>"Which areas of the work are feeling hard right now, and why?"</p>
2. Affirmation of What's Working	Celebrate the student's or team's successes. You may wish to focus your praise on evidence that students have worked through struggles, applied new learning, or found creative solutions to challenges.	"I know that last week you were having a hard time supporting your claims with evidence. I love the way you used the note cards strategy to strengthen your argument here!"
Step 3: Coaching Toward Growth	Based on your observation and discussion in step 1, identify and introduce one new strategy or resource to address a target of difficulty. If possible, have students try out the new strategy or resource while you sit with them.	"When I find myself getting confused working with ratios and proportions, I like to draw a picture. Let me show you . . . Now you try it!"

It can be helpful to keep a simple written record of the coaching conversations you have with students. These records can provide you with valuable formative assessment and instructional data for each student and/or team, and can also help you ensure that you are spending equitable time with each student you teach. Some teachers keep a binder or digital folder with two types of record-keeping documents. One document is a simple class list, noting which students have been conferred with on which dates. This makes it possible to do a quick scan and ensure that you are meeting with every student on a regular basis.



STUDENT	10/19	10/20	10/21
SCOUT FINCH	X		
RAMONA QUIMBY		X	
ADA TWIST	X		

The other type of document allows you to keep more detailed notes about the conversations you have with each student. This note-taking resource can be a useful formative assessment record to inform grouping, instructional planning, and family-teacher conferences.

STUDENT NAME		SCOUT FINCH	
DATE OF CONFERENCE	OBSERVATIONAL NOTES	TEACHING POINT	NEXT STEPS
10/19	Strong multiplication skills Having trouble unpacking real-world problems and identifying a strategy	Showed how to use a four-quadrant chart to break down a problem	Check in on use of four-quadrant chart; is it helping?



### Task Menus

Another way to organize work time and provide flexibility for students is through the use of task menus. A task menu is a list of activities that students should complete during work time or during several work time periods. The menu may include some required and some optional deliverables, and may also include some spaces for students to write their own tasks. Using a task menu helps clarify for students what they need to get done, but provides them with some flexibility and choice regarding *when* and *how* they complete these tasks.

## PRIMARY GRADES CONSIDERATIONS

Younger students will need more structure and support than older students during work time. Consider breaking work time into shorter chunks and varying tasks every 10 – 15 minutes. Station/center rotations can be a great way to keep younger students engaged in work time. Make sure to model each activity and provide picture cues and prompts as well as anchor charts to help ensure that students know the expectations for each block of work time and have the supports they need to effectively engage in this time.

## TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

### **Students are confused about tasks or expectations for work time.**

Consider providing expectations in multiple formats—verbally introducing deliverables or guidelines but also providing them digitally, on the board, or on a printed handout. Additionally, leverage the “Ask three before you ask me” rule, encouraging students to use their classmates as resources during work time so that you can focus on teaching or conferring with individuals and small groups.



### **Students are off-task or disengaged.**

Introduce accountability measures for student work time (see the *Learning Log strategy*) so that students have to report on clear deliverables for each period. Additionally, confer with these students to identify particular challenges that may be keeping them from fully engaging with the work.

### **Students missed the mark on content learning.**

If you notice that a large number of students are unclear about a major concept or skill that is necessary to effectively engage in work time, you may wish to stop work time and bring the class back together for an impromptu lesson. Additionally, moving forward, consider your planning, and make sure that you are incorporating enough formative assessment and instruction of new content in your project calendar.