

**To allow for silent participation, or participation in which silent students can feel more at ease than how they feel when speaking to large groups, teachers can ask students to engage in the following:**

- ✚ Taking notes
- ✚ Asking questions, even if in private
- ✚ Visiting the school's Writing Center/Studio
- ✚ Contributing an outside source relevant to course content
- ✚ Writing on an online discussion board, a blog, or Twitter
- ✚ Handing in written discussion questions for the day's class material
- ✚ Writing in anonymous but public spaces (For example, teachers can post a piece of paper somewhere in the classroom or in an online forum. On this paper/document, students can write questions or "takeaways." This document can be discussed periodically, once or twice a week.)
- ✚ Demonstrating attentiveness with appropriate physical responses (i.e. head nods, eye contact, facial expressions)
- ✚ Writing a reflection of the day's class discussion. Some teachers have students do a "One Minute Paper" for this. You can also use 3-2-1 for this activity (Have students write down 3 concepts/facts, 2 critical thinking questions or questions they still have about the material, and 1 opinion about the material.)
- ✚ "Snowball fighting" (Have students anonymously respond to or ask questions on a piece of paper, crumple up the paper, and throw it across the room. Another student can pick it up and respond on the paper, or communicate the comment or question to the larger class. Do this as many times you like. You can either have students turn the "snowballs" in for you to assess progress/understanding as a whole. The anonymity can help ease students' anxiety.)
- ✚ "Speed discussing" (One way to do this is to bring index cards to class and have each student take one. On the cards, have each student write a discussion question or idea that they would want to discuss further. Have half of the class form a line, and the other half stand across from them. They should be in parallel pairs at this point. Have students

engage in discussion for three minutes (or your preferred amount of time). After three minutes, have the “responding side” of the line rotate to the next person. You can do one round during which both people discuss their questions or observations, or two rounds, with only one person at a time posing a question or observation. This is not meant to create the dynamic of one person asking and one person responding, but rather to have the pairs engage in discussion. Though this isn’t a “silent” activity, students feel much more comfortable talking to one person at a time, especially when everyone else is talking at the same time and they don’t have to worry about the attention being on them. It can also be a great opportunity to move class outdoors.)

- ✚ Writing a reflective essay or creating a video essay about how they feel and what they think about verbal participation (this could include verbal narration or not). As Mary M. Reda did, instead of making assumptions and judgments, it’s more productive to ask students to provide us with insights we may lack. If done early in the semester/year, it can also give you a sense of how to best meet students’ needs as a whole.
- ✚ Role playing (This can be done in small groups or as a whole class, but if you’re aiming for an activity where quiet students are more at ease, this will be best in pairs or small groups. For this activity, assign each student an ‘identity’ as a particular author from the course (or character from a reading) and have students engage in discussion from that author’s or character’s point of view. Not only will the small group dynamic help anxious or hesitant students, but having the ‘protection’ of speaking from another’s perspective might also give students an opportunity to critically explore course concepts without feeling like their own ideas are being critiqued. This is a great way to get students engaging in synthesis.)
- ✚ Writing to a pen pal or working collaboratively in GoogleDocs (This can work with other departments within the school or similar departments across institutions. It’s a great way to get students working on interdisciplinary projects.)
- ✚ Posting online or submitting via email pre-recorded responses that students have had a chance to think through and speak aloud in private (for example, a podcast or their own Ted Talk)
- ✚ Responding to questions via programs like Kahoot! or ParticiPoll (free programs in which students can respond anonymously or with a pseudonym, or at least not have to speak in front of a large group of people)

- ✚ Creating a gallery (This can be a visual compositions/graphic representations related to course content, or a written response/question. Have students post their work around the room, form pairs or groups of three, and “visit” and discuss each post. This can be as elaborate or as simple as you want. For example, I know a professor who does this with student drafts of major writing assignments.)
- ✚ Collaboratively synthesizing ideas via programs like bubbl.us or cmap (free programs that involves using words and visual representations to show connections among ideas), or perhaps Wordle.
- ✚ Using programs like Instagram and Pinterest to create a class archive (I know one professor who has students snap photos of people, events, texts, etc. that remind them of course content. The person who takes the picture then provides captions or creates “postcards” that other students also respond to in an online forum).
- ✚ Engaging in Post-it note activities (for example, idea synthesizing or storyboarding themes or processes)
- ✚ “Thinking with M&Ms” (This activity can be done individually or in a group. Prior to this activity, the teacher designates one idea/task for each color M&M. For example, red=covert arguments, green=questions about the text, blue=observations about style, (whatever suits the nature of the course). In class, have each student take M&Ms (if in a group, make sure they have a designated pile for the group). The students must count the number of M&Ms they have for each color. Then, they must think of that number of responses for the assigned task. For example, four red M&Ms means that they have to find four covert arguments in the text; five green M&Ms means that they must generate five questions about the text—pertaining to ideas they need clarified or possible research questions, etc.) I’ve had success with this activity even at the college level. Watch out for cheating. 😊
- ✚ Completing “Work in a Baggie” (This activity works well with skill-based activities, but can be adapted for other purposes. Due to preparation, teachers may want to make this a group activity, but it can be done on an individual basis. For this activity, teachers can cut paragraphs up into sentences, pages of writing into paragraphs, citations into their parts, or concept maps into individual parts, etc. The parts go into a baggie that the student(s) then receive and must put together properly (or in unique ways). This activity can address organization, transitions, grammar, punctuation, citation format, conceptual categories, or anything else the teacher sees fit for the activity.)

- ✚ Engaging in makerspaces (Set up stations around the room with different materials (markers, Play-Doh, paint, pipe cleaners, Legos/blocks, a computer, etc.). Create a list of scenarios that students choose randomly from a hat/bag (for example, “Communicate with your significant other that you want to end the relationship.”), or have students choose a finding or argument from their own papers or research projects. Using the materials at each station, have students communicate their scenario/finding/argument.
- ✚ Activities found in *Gamestorming* (cited below). This book is geared toward business activities, but can be adapted for classroom use. There is a website with the same name.

### Further Reading

- Duffey, S. (2011). “Student silences in the deep south: Hearing unfamiliar dialects.” In S. Glenn & K. Ratcliff (Eds.), *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts* (pp. 293-303). Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Gray, D., Brown, S., & Macanufo, J. (2010). *Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers*. Sebastopol, California: O'Reilly Media.
- Nadworny, E. (2016). How teachers can help ‘quiet kids’ tap their superpowers. Retrieved July 16, 2016, from <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/07/06/483272807/how-teachers-can-help-quiet-kids-tap-their-superpowers>.
- Reda, M. M. (2009). *Between Speaking and Silence*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Schultz, K. (2009). *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Zembylas, M., & Michaelides, P. (2004). The sound of silence in pedagogy. *Educational Theory*, 54(2), 193-210.

For further information about the theoretical grounding of silent participation, you may contact Jessica Corey at [Jessica.corey@duke.edu](mailto:Jessica.corey@duke.edu) or on her website: [www.jessicarosecorey.com](http://www.jessicarosecorey.com).