

# Energizing Students: State Changes and Unity Builders

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In order to maximize attention, engagement, and learning, **state changes** and **energizers/unity builders** should occur approximately every 15 minutes.

While it is important to purposefully build these strategies into your planning, savvy facilitators also read their audiences and make in-the-moment decisions about when and how to energize their students.



**State changes:** Movement that shifts our physical and mental states.

While a state change can be an actual structured activity, it doesn't have to be. Whenever you change activities to go from individual work, to paired work, to small groups, you are facilitating state changes. Likewise, when you stop to check for understanding by having students talk to each other, you are creating a state change.



**Energizers/Unity Builders:** Facilitation techniques that create renewed energy in the group and promote a sense of harmony or alignment with one another. When you facilitate a group acknowledgement or affirmation of a person's presentation with a Power Whoosh or engage the whole group in a Rhythm Stomp, you are energizing and creating unity which also helps build a sense of community in the classroom.



**Activity Shift:** Asking students to do something different from what they've been doing for the last 15–30 minutes can be a state change. For example, have students write something down after they've been listening for ten minutes, or write individually after working in a group, or talk with a partner after doing quiet individual work, etc. Think simple; think variety.



**Activity Movement:** You can use state changes to re-adjust for a new activity. For example, have students stack all the chairs in the corner if you need empty floor space; have them hang posters they just made; collect supplies for an activity and move to a new group, etc.



**Musical Chairs:** Use this activity when participants have created something at their seats that you would like other people to see (for example, if you ask participants to summarize their Cornell notes or create a visual of something, or if the table group has created a poster or some other artifact). Have participants stand and ask them to move to the music as it plays. Like musical chairs, when the music stops everyone finds a seat, sits down, and reads/reviews the targeted writing, visual, or artifact of that person/group. When you play the music again, they find another seat and repeat.



**Finger Thumb:** On one hand, hold up your index finger. On your other hand, hold up your thumb. Then, switch as fast as you can, so the hand that had the finger up now has the thumb up, and the hand that had the thumb up now has the index finger up. Repeat several times. Try it standing up. (<http://songsforteaching.com/gerardjerryevanski/>)



**Rock, Paper, Scissors:** Use rock, paper, scissors to determine who gets materials, who goes first, etc.



**Nose Goes:** Use “nose goes” (first to say and touch nose) or “moose ears” (first to say and make big ears with hands) or some other words/action that you've taught them to determine who gets materials, goes first, etc.



**Relaxation Exercises:** State changes can simply take the form of relaxation exercises: reaching for the ceiling; stretching all the muscles from toes to head, one set at a time; standing and stretching; doing mini-massages by rubbing a neighbor's shoulders, doing rain drops down their back and ending with karate chops; putting heads down and closing eyes for 30 seconds to one minute (to soft music or to guided imagery).



**Brain Gymnastics:** Ask students: “Please take out a piece of scratch paper. When I say, ‘Go!’ please write the numbers by one as fast as you can (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). Ready? Go!” Give them about 3–5 seconds.



“Please pause. Put your pencils down. When I say, ‘Go!’ please say your numbers by two as fast and as loud as you can (2, 4, 6, 8...). Ready? Go!” Give them about 3–5 seconds.

“Please pause. Pick up your pencils. When I say, ‘Go!’ please write your numbers by one as fast as you can while, at the same time, reciting your numbers by two out loud as fast as you can. Ready? Go!” Give them about 5 seconds.

“How many could do this? Great! How many found themselves writing what they were saying? Very natural! Great!” Give other words of encouragement, and then move on.

**NOTE:** We call this a “brain gym” because it forces you to use both sides of your brain simultaneously. You can use any combination of numbers: write by twos, speak by threes; write by ones, speak backwards from 100 down toward 1; write by fives, count by ones; etc. It is best to start with easy patterns and move to more challenging ones in the sequence. Have fun with this—you can do it several times a day.



**Group Shoulder Rub:** Ask students to form a circle with all the students facing the backs of each other. Start the group shoulder rub and walk around the room like a train. After circling the room with shoulder rubs one way, stop the group circle and turn around and face the shoulder of the person that rubbed your shoulder. Continue the train around the room.



**Group Matching:** Give students 15 seconds to get up and stand next to everyone in the room who is wearing the same color tops they are. Wait until everyone has found a person or group to stand next to, and then say, “Give everyone in your group a high five and say, ‘Great color choice!’ and then sit back in your seat!”



*Other grouping themes:*

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| Same size feet                             | Same color eyes                               |
| Same height                                | Same color hair                               |
| Same birthday month                        | Same kind of “bottoms” (pants, shorts, skirt) |
| Same beginning initial in their first name | (LaMeres)                                     |
| Same color shoes                           |   |



**Thumb Wrestle:** Ask students to partner up and grip left or right hands by fingers. Say, “1, 2, 3, 4, I declare a thumb war. 5, 6, 7, 8, try to keep your thumb straight!” Students begin their thumb wrestle at the word “straight.” The best two out of three wins.



(LaMeres)



**Repeat After Me:** Have students stand and repeat some action that you do: echo claps—you give a sequence of 3–5 claps and then have them repeat the claps (you can get more complex as you go along); play a mini-version of “Simon Says.” You can add a chant to go along with the claps or stomps to reinforce content or to build excitement.



**Rhythm Stomp:** Engage the room in rhythmic stomps. Have them practice the rhythm by turning to the left, turning to the right, adding hand movements. Increase the complexity by adding words or other movements.



**Neighbor to Neighbor:** Quick state changes/energizers can happen by using neighbors as “sounding boards.” Have them repeat what you just said to their neighbors; give their neighbors a high five; tell their neighbors they are awesome; turn to the person behind them and tell them what you ate for breakfast, etc.



**Power Whoosh:** To energize a presenter, or to acknowledge a job well done, have students clap three times and then say “WHOOSH!” as they fully extend arms and fingers, like they are swooshing up in the air.



**AVID Clap:** Once an audience learns the AVID clap, you can call it out anytime. Ask a student to lead it! Pound your hands loudly two times on the table and then clap your hands together. Shout, “AVID” (or some other concept you want to reinforce) on the clap. Use this instead of standard applause to shorten the amount of time it takes to acknowledge sharing, presentation, etc. **Variation:** Add “fireworks” to the AVID Clap by making a whistling sound and wiggling your fingers in the air moving downward (like fireworks sparkling downward in the sky).



**Knock and Snap:** A great way to regain students’ attention while they are working is to ask a small group to knock on the table (lightly)—“If you can hear me, knock lightly on your table.”—until everyone joins in. Then ask them to snap. (The room should get quieter.) At this point you have their attention and can easily change the activity.



**High Five/Fist Bump:** To conclude a pair/share or small group activity, ask students to give each other a high five or fist bump. Couple this with a compliment or thank you and look for all the smiles that appear!



**Touch 4 Walls:** When students need to get up and move, ask them to “touch 4 walls” and then sit down. As they visit each wall, they might identify four things they have learned, examine something on each wall, or simply say a word or phrase as they touch the wall.





**WAVE:** Create a crowd wave, just like you would see at a baseball game. Students stand up and raise their hands, then sit down as the wave moves through the room. Try doing the wave in a circle one direction and then switch directions.



**Standing “O”:** As a way to acknowledge a presenter or small group presentation, you can ask the audience to give a Standing “O.” Each person stands up and creates an “O” above their head with their arms extended towards the ceiling. They can also call out “Ohhhhh” in unison as a verbal accompaniment.



**Round of Applause:** When you ask an audience to acknowledge a group with a “Round of Applause,” clap your hands in the air and make a circle with your arms so that you are literally clapping in the shape of a circle.



**Stand Up, Sit Down:** Choose a word that represents content you are trying to teach (e.g., CORNELL). As you spell out the word, ask your audience to stand up when you say a consonant and sit down when you say a vowel. Switch it up by asking males to sit (consonant) and stand (vowel) and females to sit (vowel) and stand (consonant). You may help them by having the word posted for them to see. Challenge them by taking the word out of their line of sight.



**Go and Meet:** Ask students: “Please stand up. When I say, ‘Go!’ meet and introduce yourself to three people who are wearing the color blue...Go!” Allow this to continue for 10–15 seconds. “Stop! In the next 12 seconds, meet three people who are wearing the color red...Go!” Allow this to continue for 12 seconds. “Stop! Meet three people who are less tall than you...Go!” After the last command: “In the next seven seconds, meet one more person and find a seat!”



**NOTE:** This exercise is intended to be high energy, rapid movement, with loud music playing during each go-to-stop sequence. Allow creativity to surface, and invent new options for students to meet others. You may give only one sequence or you can give several; you decide based upon the needs of your group.

#### **Other Resources for Games and State Changes:**

Gibbs, Jeanne. *Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together*.

Gregson, Bob. *The Incredible Indoor Games Book*.

La Meres, Clare. *The Winner’s Circle: Yes I Can! Self-Esteem Lessons for the Secondary Classroom*.

Website: <http://songsforteaching.com/gerardjerryevanski/>

Website: [www.teampedia.net](http://www.teampedia.net)

Website: <http://brimhallwebsite.com/pdfs/braingymactivities.pdf>

Website: <http://esl.about.com/od/englishlessonplans/a/braingym.htm>