# Provide Balance: Novelty & Routines

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More than any other factor, what we do as teachers/trainers determines the success of our students/participants. One way we can ensure greater success is to **provide a healthy mix of novelty and routines.**

When we try to teach the way the brain best learns, we find a dilemma. On one hand, the brain seeks and attends to novelty. Novelty makes us alert, attentive, and makes content more memorable. On the other hand the brain seeks patterns. We feel comfortable when we know what to expect, what is coming next. If we never know what is coming next, we feel anxious. For us as teachers/trainers these findings seem to tug in different directions. Do we teach with more novelty than routine or vice versa?
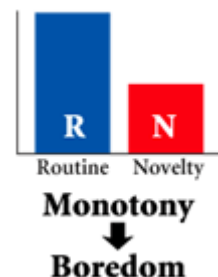
The answer is to **create a balance** between novelty and routines. With no novelty, there is monotony and boredom. With no routines, there is chaos and anxiety. Only with a healthy balance of novelty and routines is there relaxed alertness, the optimal state for learning.
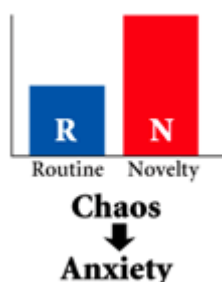
Kagan Structures help us establish the healthy balance. Structures are routines. They have predictable steps. For example, once the students/participants have done a simple **RoundRobin** a few times, the next time they are doing a **RoundRobin** they know the steps. They know what is coming next: After Person One talks, we will listen to Person Two, and so on. The steps of the structures meet the need for routine. In **Numbed Heads Together**, after the teacher asks a question, we all think and write, then we discuss, then someone will be selected to respond. The steps become a comfortable pattern.

By mixing up the structures we use, and the sequence of the structures we use, and by using novel content each time we use a structure, we meet the second need, the need for novelty. If we don't know just which structure the teacher is going to use next, or the content we will process, we remain attentive and alert.

Thus we can use structures to meet both the need for novelty and the need for routine. **Structures themselves are routines.** Mixing up their sequence and the content we use with them creates novelty. With structures you can have the best of both worlds! Have a toolbox of **Kagan Structures** and use different structures on a regular basis to create:

• **Novelty for Interest and Engagement**
• **Predictability for Security and Relaxation**

The optimal state for learning is relaxed alertness and through structures our students/participants are both relaxed *(they enjoy structures as predictable sequences)* and alert *(they enjoy the novelty of the next new structure or content)*.

Teachers ask how often to use structures. My answer is everyday in every lesson. Structures are the best way I know to:

- **Assess where students are**
- **Review content**
- **Produce higher-level thinking**
- **Make sure everyone is engaged**
- **Build positive relations among students**
- **Create both variety and predictability**

I encourage each of you to **be reflective about your lessons and trainings.** Do you have a healthy balance of routines and novelty?