

Checking for Understanding

Ideas for effectively checking student comprehension

"Are there any questions?" We've all said it to our students after giving instructions. Yet, if none of the students asks a question, it doesn't mean that everyone gets it. So how do we check for understanding, before proceeding further? Here are three simple strategies you might try after giving instructions to your class.

Partner Summary: Have each student turn to a partner and take half a minute to come to agreement on what the directions are. Then have a volunteer summarize the directions for the class. And then you can ask for questions. Better yet, say "Raise your hand if you can think of a question someone else might have about what we're about to do." Your overachievers will chime in with questions, some of which will help your reticent participants (thanks to Spence Rogers -www.peaklearning.com- for this "deferred question" strategy).

Random Response Summary: Call on Manuel to state the first step in the instructions. Then call on Sally to say if she agrees with him or not. Then call on George to repeat what Manuel said. Repeat this process for each step of the instructions. A variation is to give each student the choice of adding to the instructions, or echoing (repeating) the previous student.

Choral Summary: Repeat the directions leaving one critical word out, and have the class all fill in the word in unison. For example, you say "The first thing you will do when I say "go" is take out a piece of ----?" and the students all call out "paper!" Then you say "And once you have the paper you need to write three things on it. The first thing to write is your ----?" They all say "name!" Then you say "And after your name you will need to copy from the board the---?" and they say "question!" Make sure to give the students enough information so they can succeed, and have the gap in your speech be the last word in each sentence. To help get the response you want, put your hand to your ear when you want students to speak their word out loud.