

Silent Start

If you want to engage students in partner, group, or independent work but loathe the amount of time lost to off-task behavior as they get down to business, "Silent Start" may be the answer you've been looking for.

WHAT IS SILENT START?

After transitioning from direct instruction to students working, have students start their task in silence. Silent start can last as little as two minutes or as long as five minutes.



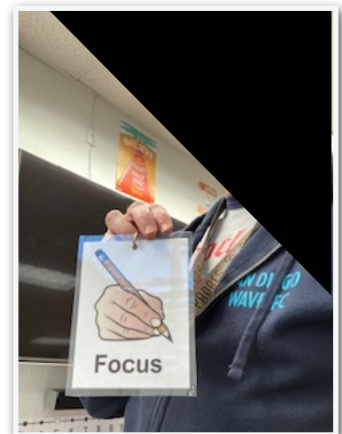
WHY IS SILENT START USEFUL?

Having students start their independent, partner, or group work in silence encourages students to get right to work instead of dragging out the transition with off-task talk or distracting behavior. It also allows the teacher to quickly assess who is getting right on the task and who isn't. Anyone who is talking or standing isn't on task. The teacher can then immediately intervene with these individuals and gently press them into the silent start. This technique also increases the academic rigor for

all students and ensures that all students produce some independent work and have something to contribute when the silent start ends and partner talk, small group collaboration, or whole class discussion begins.

IS THE TEACHER SILENT, TOO?

Yes! Teachers often inadvertently undermine the effectiveness of a silent start by not being silent themselves. Any time the teacher is speaking, even if it is just quietly to one student, it will draw attention and distract other students from their silent work. Consequently, silent start works best when the teacher is silent, too. It is essential that the teacher have a non-verbal way to redirect struggling or off-task students. One simple way to do this is to create a visual that represents "Get Started" and introduce it to students. Let them know that during silent starts, if they aren't silent (or if they are silent but they aren't working) you will get their attention - nonverbally if possible - and show them the visual card. They then need to immediately become silent, pick up their pencil, and begin working. This will allow you to silently, or at least more quietly, reinforce the silent start.



Need some examples? See the next page...

Silent Start Examples

EXAMPLE #1: Collaborative group work

Explain and model for students what a silent start looks and sounds like. Set a specific time, like 5 minutes, and have them practice getting into their groups, getting their materials out, getting silent, and getting started. During this 5 minutes, all group members can silently read or review the instructions or silently begin working on the task on their own or they can make a list of questions or thoughts they have about the task. Circulate during this time and non-verbally redirect those students who are struggling to get quiet and on-task. After 5 minutes, let students begin to collaborate together on the task with their group-mates.

EXAMPLE #2: Centers & Rotations

Explain and model for students what a silent start looks and sounds like. Set a specific time, like 2 minutes, and have them practice rotating from one center to the next, getting seated, getting their materials, and starting their work individually and in silence. Circulate during the first two minutes of each rotation to ensure that everyone is silent, has their materials, and has actually started working on something. If one center is using tablets or computers, make sure they are logged in, have headphones plugged in, and have begun a task. Non-verbally or very quietly help those that need extra support to get started. After two minutes, return to your small group and start your small group lesson, letting the rest of the class know they can quietly work with peers near them if they want to.

- ▶ TIP 1: If you are spending more than 15 minutes in a single rotation, at a natural midway point, reset the class's focus by having them do another 2 minutes in silence while you quickly rotate to check on each student's focus and progress.
- ▶ TIP 2: Have a nonverbal hand-signal or image to reinforce quiet and focus so that you can limit the use of your voice. Redirecting off-task or straggling students verbally will distract those that are already silent and working.
- ▶ TIP 3: Use a song or short music clip to indicate how much time students have to rotate from one center to the next. When the song clip ends, start the timer for the 2-minute silent start. If that seems overly complicated or difficult to manage, you might instead consider using a 3-minute silent start so that students have one minute to physically rotate and get settled and then two minutes for silent focused work.

EXAMPLE #3: Independent Work

Explain and model for students what a silent start looks and sounds like. Set a specific time, like 5 minutes, and have them practice getting any necessary materials, getting settled at their desks, and getting silently started on a task. Circulate during this time and redirect students who are struggling to get quiet and on-task. Do not allow any questions during this time. After 5 minutes, allow students to ask questions if they need help with the task.

- ▶ TIP: Front load students with 3+ specific techniques for what to do if they are stuck or unsure how to begin the task during the silent start. For example, you might teach them to look at the board for instructions, re-read the directions on their paper, look unobtrusively at a neighbor's paper and see what they are doing, skip a question or section they don't understand and come back to it later, draw an answer they are unsure how to write, write down their questions so they can ask you after the silent start ends. Each of these ideas can be further reinforced by making laminated visual bookmarks to give to students. Each bookmark will have visuals or symbols that represent each of these strategies as a reminder and reference.