



EPHS Teaching and Learning Blog

Checking for Understanding



WHAT'S THE IDEA?

- A central idea in Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction is that more effective teachers will systematically check for understanding from their students.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- We can't assume students have understood words, ideas, concepts, explanations or procedures unless we get some feedback from them, telling us what they have understood. The information we receive by checking should inform the next steps in a learning sequence: to re-teach some material, tackle misconceptions or perhaps move on more quickly to new material. The checking process itself also helps students to secure deeper understanding

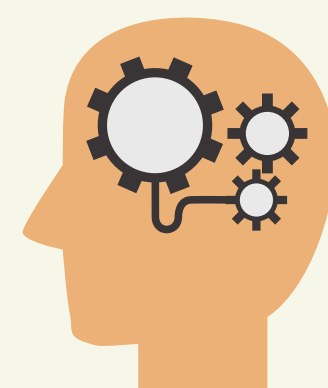


WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

Checking for understanding means that you take time to explore the extent of understanding around the room. It requires asking multiple students, deliberately selected, to share their understanding with you. This works well for multiple situations:

- Asking students to rehearse the line of reasoning in a maths or science problem or any more extended question response. Even if you have already just gone over it, it is powerful to see if students understood what you meant. They might have got the gist but not picked up on a crucial step.
- Asking students to clarify their understanding of a task, some practical work or even the homework. "Michael, tell us what the task is and how we will know when we've completed it." If Michael, and then Jodie or Evan, can't give a good answer, it will pay to re-explain.

The key is to try to ask for feedback – to check for understanding – from several students, using other strategies like "cold calling", where any student could be asked to answer if selected, to ensure that nobody opts out. If one student gives a good answer, you then check in with someone else to see if they can too; and then yet another student. Very often variations in their responses gives you important information in a way that a single response can't. You can also insist that answers build on previous responses so students are fully engaged in what others are saying and referencing this to their own understanding.



TOP TIP

- It is not much good just asking one student; their one response doesn't tell you anything about what anyone else might be thinking



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

[HTTPS://JONATHANSANDLING.COM/HOW-TO-ASK-PROBING-QUESTIONS/](https://jonathansandling.com/how-to-ask-probing-questions/)