

Checking for Understanding

The 10-minute learning walk · a one-page observation for senior leaders
· tells asking apart from checking

CLASS / YEAR	SUBJECT	DATE	OBSERVER
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Learning task observed:

Communicating Clearly One of the eight learning behaviours in the Structural Learning Framework. A check is the moment a learner has to make thinking visible.	How many learners has the teacher actually seen? A few ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ All	Watch these four learners, not the room ☐ One who never volunteers ☐ One who always does ☐ One working quietly ☐ One you would worry about
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STRAND: WHAT TO LOOK FOR	NOT SEEN	EMERGING	EMBEDDED	EVIDENCE SEEN
Sampling <i>who is the check actually about</i> - The teacher says how learners will answer before asking - More than the volunteers have to commit to an answer - Every learner produces a response at the same time	☐	☐	☐	
Visibility <i>can the teacher see the thinking, or only hear it</i> - Understanding is judged from something more than talk - Learners show thinking: a board, a line, a signal - The teacher reads all of it before moving on	☐	☐	☐	
Consequence <i>what changes because of what the check found</i> - The teacher pauses on what the answers actually showed - The explanation changes, it is not repeated louder - The next step differs for the learners who need it	☐	☐	☐	
Error <i>what happens to a wrong answer</i> - A wrong answer stays in the room, not swapped out - The error is named as useful, nobody is embarrassed - The class works on why the wrong answer was tempting	☐	☐	☐	

The asking trap: these look like checking and are not

- ☐ "Does everyone understand?"
 ☐ "Any questions?"
 ☐ Thumbs up round the room
 ☐ The four fastest hands
☐ One right answer from one learner

Ask a learner, not the teacher

- ☐ "How do you know that is right?"
 ☐ "What is the tricky bit here?"
 ☐ "Show me what you are least sure of"

One thing to celebrate

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One coaching question to leave

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Follow-up / re-visit

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Asking or Checking?

A quick self-check for teachers · six dimensions · score out of 24

Asking is a question. Checking is evidence, from every learner, in time to do something about it. The two feel almost identical to teach and produce completely different lessons. Score each dimension **0–4** against your own practice, add the six for a total out of 24, then read your band. Honest beats generous: this is a compass, not a grade.

- 1 I decide how everyone will answer before I ask**
Learners know whether they are writing it, telling a partner or all showing me, before the question arrives. 0 1 2 3 4
- 2 I can see the thinking, not just hear it**
Every learner leaves a trace I can read: a whiteboard, a written line, a hand signal that means something specific. 0 1 2 3 4
- 3 I check before the point of no return**
The check happens before the practice task, not after it, so a misunderstanding does not get rehearsed for twenty minutes. 0 1 2 3 4
- 4 I know who I have not seen today**
I can name the learners whose thinking I have not looked at this lesson, and I go and look. 0 1 2 3 4
- 5 A wrong answer gets worked on, not replaced**
I keep the error in the room long enough to ask why it was tempting, rather than swapping it for a right one. 0 1 2 3 4
- 6 What I find changes the next ten minutes**
When the check shows a gap, the lesson bends. If it never bends, the check was decoration. 0 1 2 3 4

Your total

/ 24

0–8 Asking

You are asking the room and hearing from the willing. Next step: for one lesson, have everyone answer at the same time, in writing.

9–16 Sampling

You see more than the volunteers. Next step: move the check earlier, before the practice task rather than after it.

17–24 Checking

You see the class and you act on what you see. Next step: hand the check over, and let learners tell you what has not landed.

Why “any questions?” tells you nothing

A learner who has misunderstood something usually does not know they have. Asking the room to self-report a gap asks them to find a thing they cannot see, in front of everyone. Rosenshine’s fifth principle is not check understanding, it is **check the understanding of all learners**, and the word doing the work is **all**. Nuthall’s recordings found that what any two learners already knew, and already misunderstood, differed far more than teachers assumed.