

Brain breaks: pause, activity and return plans

Plan an ordinary pause, familiar activity, specific return cue and first next task. Judge time and space fit rather than a promised benefit.

Year 4 English: Desk-side reach

Planning time: 60 seconds

Teacher context

Year 4 English: pause between writing two short sections.

Pause cue

Finish your current word, put the pencil down and pause.

Activity directions

Stay in your usual place. Raise both hands, lower them, then reach forward and bring them back. Repeat the familiar pattern until the return cue. Use the class's usual seated or standing version.

Return cue

Stop the pattern, lower your hands and look at the next sentence.

First next task

Write the first sentence of your next section. Start with the opening words you planned.

Logistical fit: Uses the usual desk space and a simple repeatable pattern; no extra equipment.

Local observation: Check whether the class stopped on the cue and began the named sentence. Record what happened, without attributing a learning gain to the pause.

Year 7 history: Alternating taps

Planning time: 60 seconds

Teacher context

Year 7 history: pause between reading a short passage and beginning questions.

Pause cue

Mark your place in the passage, put the pen down and pause.

Activity directions

Remain in your usual place. Tap your left hand and then your right hand lightly on the desk or your lap. Repeat the alternating pattern until the return cue.

Return cue

Stop the taps, place your hands still and return to the marked passage.

First next task

Read the first question and underline its command word. Then locate the sentence the question asks you to use.

Logistical fit: A seated pattern that keeps books in place and avoids a change of classroom location.

Local observation: Notice whether learners stopped tapping and could name the first question's instruction. This is a local observation, not evidence of improved memory or achievement.

Year 8 science: Stand and return

Planning time: 45 seconds

Teacher context

Year 8 science: pause after completing a table and before answering a question.

Pause cue

Finish the current table entry, put your pen down and pause.

Activity directions

Stay in your usual place. Stand and sit back down, repeating the familiar pattern until the return cue. For the usual seated version, raise and lower the left hand, then the right hand, and repeat.

Return cue

Stop the movement and look at the first question.

First next task

Read the first question. Point to the table entry you will use, then begin your answer.

Logistical fit: A brief change of posture in the existing place, followed by one named next step.

Local observation: Check whether learners found the requested table entry and started their answer. Do not interpret the observation as a causal effect of the activity.

Plan a pause and return

Use the plan to name what happens before, during and after the pause.

Class/context	Activity label
Planning time	Pause cue
Activity directions	Return cue
First next task	

Local observation: What did I notice about stopping and beginning the next task?
Record a local observation without claiming a learning or memory effect.

Notebook planning practice

Write your plans and explanations in your notebook. Each scenario supplies its time, classroom arrangement and next task. Other wording can be suitable when it preserves those facts.

1. **Task 1.** Scenario: a class has 60 seconds between two writing sections. Learners stay at their desks. The next task is the first sentence of section two. Choose one supplied activity and write complete pause, activity, return and next-task instructions.

2. **Task 2.** Scenario: Year 7 learners have marked their place in a reading passage and used alternating taps. The plan says only "Back to work". The next task is to read question one and underline its command word. Improve the return cue and first instruction.

3. **Task 3.** Scenario: a science class has 45 seconds after a table entry. The teacher chooses the class's usual stand-and-sit or seated movement pattern. The first question asks which table entry will be used. Write the pause cue, return cue and next task.

4. **Task 4.** Scenario: after a planned pause, the teacher records that most learners stopped tapping and began question one. Another note says "The break improved everyone's memory". Decide which note is supported by the supplied observation and write a useful follow-up.

Model plans and reasoning

Task 1

One suitable model is Desk-side reach. Pause: finish the current word and put the pencil down. Activity: use the familiar raise/lower/forward/back pattern in the usual place. Return: stop the pattern, lower hands and look at the next sentence. Next task: write the first sentence of section two. 60 seconds is a planning choice, not an optimum dose.

Task 2

Return cue: stop the taps and place your hands still. Next task: return to the marked passage, read question one and underline its command word. This names the action to stop and the exact task to begin. It does not guarantee a better learning outcome.

Task 3

Pause: finish the current table entry and put your pen down. Return: stop the movement and look at the first question. Next task: read the question, point to the table entry you will use and begin the answer. Keep the chosen 45-second time as a logistical plan, not a tested requirement.

Task 4

Keep the observation that most learners stopped tapping and began question one. The information supplies no memory measurement or comparison, so it does not support the memory claim. A useful follow-up is to make the stopping cue and first instruction clearer for learners who had not restarted. Record the next observation without claiming causation.

CDC (2024) classroom physical-activity guidance; Watson et al. (2017), Ruhland and Lange (2021), Masini et al. (2020) physical-activity reviews with population/design/outcome limits. Examples, times and layout are author proposals.