

## E-3: Check for academic understanding

### Consider different methods for selecting student responses

#### What different methods can I use to select student responses?

Whole class checks for understanding									
<b>Why?</b>	Easy and efficient way to see what <i>every</i> student is thinking in a given moment								
<b>Caveat</b>	Harder to see the depth of understanding, not as easy to follow-up on individual responses								
<b>Examples</b>	<b>Examples:</b> whiteboards, thumbs-up/thumbs-down, fist to five, sign language, signal cards <b>See below for explanations and advantages and disadvantages of each example</b>								
Targeted individual checks for understanding									
<b>Why?</b>	Elicit responses that represent students from across the academic spectrum, allow for more complex responses that provide deeper insight into student knowledge, easier to follow-up with individual students								
<b>Caveat</b>	only shows you what one student knows at a time, not as efficient								
<b>How?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze assessment data in your tracking systems to know the mastery levels of all students (CIE)</li> <li>Track who you check (using a chart with mastery groups) to ensure you distribute questions to a variety of students from all mastery groups (top-tier, mid-tier, and bottom tier)</li> <li>Check different students for different lessons – not everyone will have the same level of mastery for all skills, topics, or subjects</li> </ul>								
Random individual checks for understanding									
<b>Why?</b>	Ensure equitable distribution of questions among all students, allow for more complex responses that provide deeper insight into student knowledge, easier to follow-up with individual students								
<b>Caveat</b>	Only shows you what one student knows at a time, not as efficient as whole class checks, not as strategic as targeted individual checks								
<b>Examples</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Example</th> <th>Description</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>Note Cards</b></td> <td>Write each student's name on an individual 3x5 index card. Compile all the cards in one stack. When selecting students read the name on top of the stack then turn to the next card.</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Seating Chart</b></td> <td>Have a clipboard with the classroom seating chart. Each time you ask a question, make a mark next to the name of the student whom you asked. Check to see if each student has been asked a question before you ask a second.</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Popsicle Sticks</b></td> <td>Write each student's name on a tongue depressor or Popsicle stick. Place all of the sticks in a jar. When you are ready to select a student, randomly pull one stick.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Example	Description	<b>Note Cards</b>	Write each student's name on an individual 3x5 index card. Compile all the cards in one stack. When selecting students read the name on top of the stack then turn to the next card.	<b>Seating Chart</b>	Have a clipboard with the classroom seating chart. Each time you ask a question, make a mark next to the name of the student whom you asked. Check to see if each student has been asked a question before you ask a second.	<b>Popsicle Sticks</b>	Write each student's name on a tongue depressor or Popsicle stick. Place all of the sticks in a jar. When you are ready to select a student, randomly pull one stick.
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**Note:** after choosing what methods work for you in different circumstances, remember to create class routines to use these methods effectively. If you don't think through how exactly you want to conduct the check, it will not go smoothly in

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class and you won't get reliable information about student understanding. To read more about how to plan your procedures, visit the P-6 page, and to read more about implementing them, visit the E-5 page.

### What are the advantages and disadvantages of different whole class checks?

No single method for checking whole class understanding will work in every circumstance; many teachers often use a combination of methods. Consider the costs and benefits of each technique and determine what will meet the needs of your students or lesson. The quality of a method depends on several factors – efficiency, extent of student understanding revealed, number of students whose understanding is checked, and ease of follow-up.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Individual slates/ Whiteboards</b>  Students write responses and show work on a board that they hold up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective assessment; can reveal deeper understanding if students show work/thinking for answers</li> <li>Whole class understanding assessed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not the most efficient (time-consuming to give problems/examples and have students solve)</li> <li>Not too easy to follow-up on immediately with individual students (OK for whole class gauge)</li> <li>Students could copy – but you can monitor them somewhat easily</li> </ul>
<b>Thumbs up/down</b>  Students respond to a yes/no question by showing either thumb up (yes/agree), thumb down (no/disagree), or thumb flat (uncertain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very efficient</li> <li>Can theoretically check all students understanding</li> <li>Good for checking if students are “with you” in the lesson (e.g., if they can tell you during modeling solving a math equation if you are doing the correct step at the correct time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doesn't reveal deep understanding/misunderstanding (just yes/no/don't know answers)</li> <li>Students may copy what their peers are doing [consider what effect the reputation of the student you call on might have on other students' judgments – i.e., if Audrey is generally known to get things correct, or to be a poetry whiz, might classmates give a thumbs up and not really know the answer?]</li> <li>Not too easy to follow up on immediately</li> </ul>
<b>Fist to Five</b>  Students respond to a question by showing a number of fingers (fist (0) – strongly disagree, 5 fingers – strongly agree)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficient (you'd just have to teach students the scale)</li> <li>Can reveal gradations; subjective assessment – allows for students to self-assess</li> <li>Can check the whole class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks students to self- assess, which may or may not be reliable</li> <li>Not too easy to follow up on immediately</li> </ul>
<b>Sign Language/ Multiple Choice</b>  Students know sign language and show their choice of letter to respond to various questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very efficient</li> <li>Objective assessment; can reveal student understanding (esp. if there are multiple choice answers that target common misunderstandings)</li> <li>Checks the whole class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not too easy to follow up on immediately</li> <li>You need to spend time teaching the different signs (and be sure that students can do them correctly)</li> <li>Students may copy their peers' responses</li> </ul>
<b>Signal cards</b>  Students use cards with different answer choices on them to respond to a question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efficient</li> <li>Checks the whole class</li> <li>Good for identifying or classifying a series of items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to make the cards for different word pairs</li> <li>Can't provide in depth answers – just a choice between a few words</li> </ul>