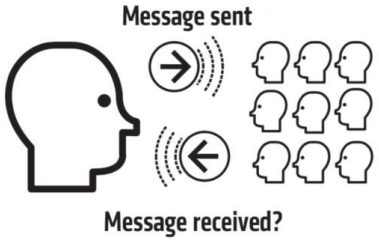
Checking for understanding

"The most effective teachers frequently check to see if all students were learning new materials" **Barak Rosenshine**

Checking for understanding

Checking for understanding (CFU) is a formative assessment method that allows us to assess & make inferences about students' understanding and then use this information to inform what happens next in the lesson.



What does the research say?

In Rosenshine's 6th principle on instruction, he highlights two benefits of regular CFU:

- CFU helps students make connections to other lesson content which cements this information into their long-term memory.
- Teachers can identify areas that need to be revisited or retaught.

The EEF Guidance Report on Feedback suggests using formative assessment is useful to assess pupils learning gap before providing high quality feedback.

Wiliam's work on Formative Assessment points out the need for teachers to use discussions, tasks and activities that elicit evidence of learning

Checking for Understanding Strategies

Show Call

- Teacher asks a question or poses a problem to class to be answered on mini whiteboards
- Students *simultaneously* show their mini whiteboards so you can scan written responses
- Insist *everyone* writes and in a large font so you can see.
- Use MCQs for simplicity

Diagnostic Questions

- After new content/concept is taught, the teacher poses an MCQ to the class which is answered on mini whiteboard e.g. *A, B or C.*
- The teacher can immediately see the level of understanding and misconception and then, either reteach, or move on.

Visual or Choral Response

- Students give thumbs up/down or hands up to signal answers or their level of understanding
- For choral response, ask the class to respond at the same time, as soon as you signal 'go'
- Teacher listens for the correct answer. Great for vocabulary.

Questioning

- Use a range of techniques
- Cold Call is a powerful method to CFU for the whole class.
- Probing questions allow you to dig deeper in student responses
- Process questions to get students to explain methods
- Combine with Think, Pair, Share

Do's and Don'ts

To really maximise how you check understanding, follow this guidance

- Clearly identify '*What you want students to know*' and '*how will I know if they haven't got it*' first.
- Take a large sample of the class in CFU, up the ratio!
- Ask students 'what' they have understood, not 'if'
- Train your students in each of these strategies, e.g. show call
- Plan for CFU, aim to tease out known misconceptions
- Avoid asking questions like *'Has everyone understood?'* or '*Can we move on?*' as any response will be inconclusive
- Don't use one student to gauge class understanding
- Reject '*Self reporting*'. Even if a student says that they have understood, they don't know, what they don't know!

When should you check for understanding?

Modelling - CFU checks for the content students need AND the process they will use when completing. It can be used powerfully during the 'I' and 'We' process. Put work under the visualiser.

Explanations - Get students to summarise the concept/story so far after exposition. Punctuate explanations with diagnostic questions and Cold Call to assess understanding. Ask them to make predictions

End of Lessons - Exit tickets allow teachers to assess on a specific area, allowing feedback next lesson.

Giving Instructions - When giving instructions for a task or homework, get students to repeat the directions of procedures back to you

Reading – Focus CFU strategies on the content in the text, new vocabulary and anything that students may find hard/confusing.

Additional Reading

- *Sherrington & Cavilioli – Walkthrus 3*
- *Lemov – Teach Like a Champion 3.0*
- *Rosenshine – Principles of Instruction*
- *Boxer – Teaching Secondary Science*
- *Hattie – Visible Learning*

Checking for understanding

Suggested Reading

Blog	Author	Link
#7 This week, in history… I've been checking 'for' understanding less. This is what I've been doing instead.	*Jonnie Grande @Jonniegrande*	https://curricularpasts.wordpress.com/2022/03/13/7-this-week-in-history-ive-been-checking-for-understanding-less-this-is-what-ive-been-doing-instead/
When they haven't got it	Kat Howard @saysmiss	https://saysmiss.wordpress.com/2022/02/16/teaching-when-they-havent-got-it/
My Journey to Check For Understanding	Deepika Narula @MrsDNarula	https://activatingteaching.wordpress.com/2022/01/04/my-journey-to-check-for-understanding/
Are you actually checking for understanding?	Claudi BenDavid @MBDscience	https://mbdscience.wordpress.com/2022/03/20/are-you-actually-checking-for-understanding/
Check for understanding for responsive teaching in science	Jasper Green @sci_challenge	https://thescienceteacher.co.uk/check-for-understanding-in-science/
Check for Understanding… why it matters and how to do it.	Tom Sherrington @teacherhead	https://teacherhead.com/2021/10/17/check-for-understanding-why-it-matters-and-how-to-do-it-redsurrey21/
Checking for Understanding	Tom Needham @teacherhead	https://tomneedhamteach.wordpress.com/2021/11/08/checking-for-understanding/
Five Ways to: Check for Understanding	Tom Sherrington @teacherhead	https://teacherhead.com/2021/12/02/five-ways-to-check-for-understanding/
Rosenshine's Sixth Principle of Instruction; Checking for Understanding	Inner Drive @Inner_Drive	https://blog.innerdrive.co.uk/rosenshine-sixth-principle-of-instruction

The following books & resources are all in the staff CPD Library and provide a range of evidence around CFU and useful strategies.