Five Ways To: Check for Understanding

Ask students *what* they've understood not *if* they've understood

In Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction, he stresses the importance of Checking for Understanding. It is important to ask students *what* they've understood, not *if* they've understood, engaging two or more of them in short probing dialogues. Rosenshine suggests several ways that effective teachers check for understanding. Each works particularly well when paired with Cold Calling, so all students develop attentional habits in readiness to share their understanding if and when they're asked.

So, that's how a valley is formed. Let's try to summarise the main steps? …Jenny, have a go.

> Developing this repertoire of methods for different situations, switching between them in planned and spontaneous moments, can make teaching highly responsive, adapting to the feedback students are giving through their responses.

Five ways to check for understanding

1	**Summarise the story so far**
2	**Repeat instructions**
3	**Agree or disagree**
4	**Think aloud as you plan**
5	**Explain or defend your position**

Summarise the story so far

Whether reading a story or text or giving an explanation of any kind, stop at key moments to ask a student to summarise what they've understood so far. This prevents you from the delusion that it's all somehow just *going in*. You stop to check! Also, summarising is a good thinking process for the students who are asked.

Repeat instructions

This seems so obvious, but it's not routine for everyone, and it makes a big difference – saving time compared to having to interrupt and redirect confused students later on. Whenever you've given instructions for a task, an activity, or some homework…. get a couple of students to repeat them back to you to check that they understood the details.

Robert, let me check.. what do you think I've asked everyone to do?

Agree or disagree

This has two useful applications. One is to help students form their own opinions — allowing them scope to agree or disagree. The other is as a way to secure attention when other students are talking — a soft check for listening and engagement as well as for understanding. Embedded in this is the follow-on *and why?* Students should give their reasons.

Think aloud as you plan

This takes time to embed as a normal routine — because students are largely used to thinking privately — in the hidden way we all do. Promoting metacognitive talk is a powerful approach in general and normalising *thinking aloud* can help to explore students' thought processes as they work out how they'll approach a task.

I agree with Ashly becasue …

Explain or defend your position

When students express opinions or give an analysis, it's helpful to check they understand the underlying concepts rather than having learned stock responses without a supporting schema. So, when students make an initial response, probe further, asking them to explain key points or to defend their position, perhaps with a counterargument as a reference.