

Checking for Understanding

When people are passionate and excited about a topic, practicing active listening that seeks to deepen understanding can be very difficult. This exercise is especially developed to practice listening to another person and then checking for correct understanding. Students practice checking for understanding by repeating what they heard from their partner until the partner confirms that they have been understood. In addition to this principle, this activity supports Learning Through Thinking and Learning Through Reflection and Evaluation.

Expected Outcome(s)

Students will:

- *Be able to describe what active listening looks like.*
- *Be able to demonstrate active listening behaviours*
- *Be able to ask clarifying questions to assure understanding*
- *Be able to accurately restate another student's perspective/thinking/feeling/opinion*

Timing

The timing of this activity is dependent on many factors: experience, classroom culture, and how you implement it, etc., the minimum amount of time you should plan for this method is 45 minutes (The protocol requires 22 minutes, and needs some set up and transition time, and reflection). The first time you introduce this activity, you should plan for at least 60 minutes so that everyone understands the protocol.

Material

- *Space for pairs of students to sit together*
- *A timer system*

Prepare yourself

Create an overview of the protocol exact step by step guide of the exercise, so everyone can see it:

1. *Student #1 speaks first; Student #2 listens actively - **3 minutes***
2. *Student #2 repeats what they think they heard partner #1 said; Student #1 listens carefully – **3 minutes***
3. *Student #1 corrects any misunderstandings student #2 had and expands on what they thought was important and missed; Student #2 listens actively – **2 minutes***
4. *Student #2 restates what student #1 said incorporating any corrections or important points they missed. – **2 minutes***
5. *Student #1 confirms whether they were understood – **1 minute***
6. *Switch roles and begin again.*

Step-by-step or course

You can use this method any time you want:

- *your students to practice actively listening and understanding one another*
- *to increase student understanding of other's perspectives.*

It is a very set protocol (you can change the minutes for speaking depending on your students) with clear outcomes – listening and understanding what your partner is saying.

1 Input

- Choose a societal issue: maybe you are already working on one, or something has arisen in the classroom, the school or your community.
- Start small: begin by asking simple questions and as your students gain more practice using the protocol.
- More advanced: you can engage them in more complex questions and discussions.

Make sure to introduce and review the protocol (each time) and make sure that everyone understands their role.

Break the students into pairs, make sure each pair knows who is students #1 and who is student #2. For this example, we offer this question: “What are your ideas about making recess a safe and fun time for everyone?”

2 Explore first causes

7. *Student #1 speaks first; student #2 listens actively - **3 minutes***
8. *Student #2 repeats what they think they heard student #1 said; student #1 listens carefully – **3 minutes***
9. *Student #1 corrects any misunderstandings student #2 had and expands on what they thought was important and missed; Student #2 listens actively – **2 minutes***
10. *Student #2 restates what student #1 said incorporating any corrections or important points they missed. – **2 minutes***
11. *Student #1 confirms whether they were understood – **1 minute***
12. *Switch roles and begin again.*

3 Reflection

Bring the students together for a group reflection on the process, especially the first few times you try it.

- How did it feel to listen carefully and try to say what your partner said?
- How did it feel to hear your partner explain what they thought you said?
- How did it feel to talk without anyone interrupting you?
- How did it feel to stay silent when your partner was talking?

After you have used this exercise several times you can begin to reflect and even evaluate it in various ways (see Learning through Reflection and Evaluation module).