



Checking for Understanding. Weavers on a page (adaptive teaching)

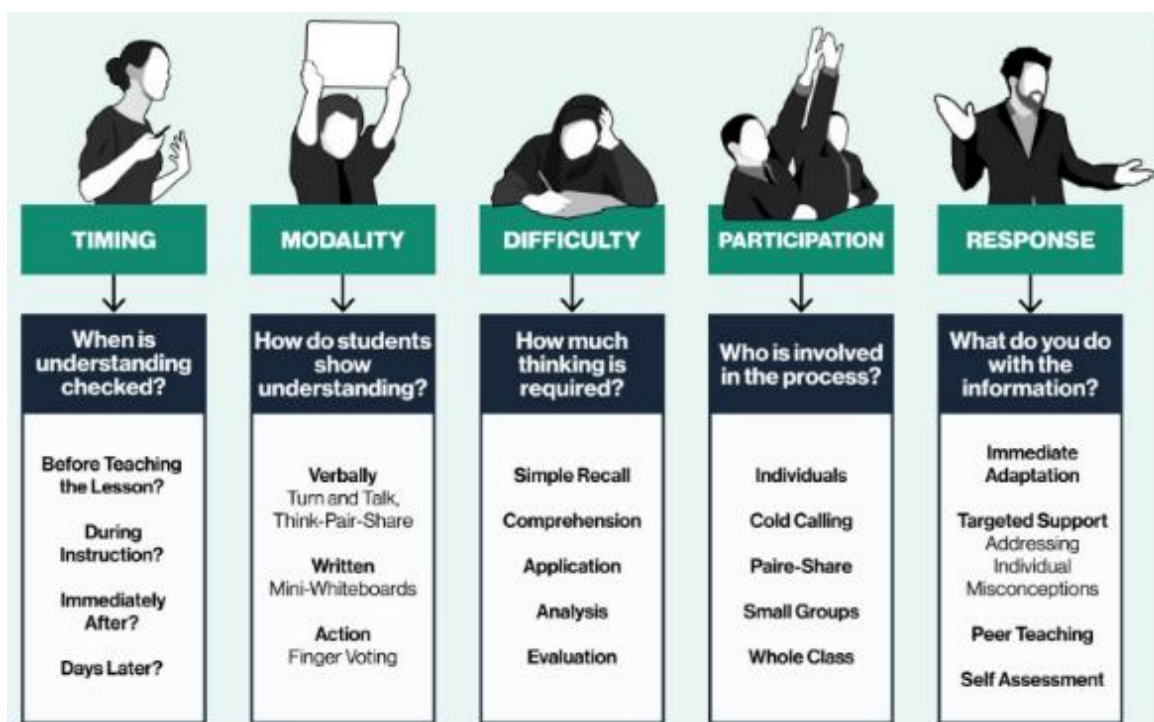
What is Checking for Understanding?

CfU is the ongoing process of asking students to **show** you their thinking so you can adjust teaching immediately. Rather than asking “Does that make sense?” or “Who can tell me the answer?” you ask targeted questions, so every student demonstrates what they’ve understood

- ✓ **Diagnostic, Not Summative:** It reveals understanding in real time.
- ✓ **Inclusive and Active:** Every student shows their thinking.
- ✓ **Responsive and Actionable:** It shapes what happens next in the lesson.
- ✓ **A Habit, Not a Bolt-on:** Woven through instruction at planned intervals.

How do I Effectively Check for Understanding?

- **Show Me What You Know:** Use mini whiteboards.
- **Teach It Back:** Ask students to summarise, explain, or model a process to a partner or the class to surface misconceptions.
- **Probe & Follow Up:** Cold call a range of students, then ask “why?” or “how do you know?” to deepen thinking and expose reasoning.
- **Agree–Disagree + Why:** Present a statement or answer and have students indicate agree/disagree, then justify their stance.
- **Think-Pair-Share-Check:** Give students a brief question to answer individually, discuss with a neighbour, then sample responses publicly.
- **Repeat the Directions:** After giving instructions for a task, call on a couple of students to restate the steps to ensure clarity.
- **Defend Your Position:** Ask students to give an opinion or solution and then support it with evidence or a counterexample.



Here's a simple six step approach to help develop a CfU culture in your classroom:

Step	Explanation	Example
<p>1. Signal the Purpose</p> <p>→ Purpose: Build trust and clarity so students know CfU is supportive, not evaluative; primes them to respond honestly.</p>	<p>Make it clear to students that these checks are <i>diagnostic</i>, not a test. Explain that showing their thinking helps you adapt teaching and helps them spot gaps early.</p>	<p><i>"I'm going to ask some questions as we go — not to grade you, but to see how well it's landing so we can adjust together."</i></p>
<p>2. Plan the Sequence</p> <p>→ Purpose: Ensure your questions cover both basic recall and deeper thinking, surfacing misconceptions early.</p>	<p>Pre-plan a run of CfU questions moving from recall to deeper application. This keeps checks intentional rather than ad-hoc.</p>	<p>→ Baseline: <i>"Write one example from last lesson."</i> → Misconception probe: <i>"True or False — explain why..."</i> → Contextual application: <i>"How could [concept] solve [real-world scenario]?"</i></p>
<p>3. Vary the Modality</p> <p>→ Purpose: Increase engagement and accessibility; give all learners a way to show their thinking.</p>	<p>Use different formats so every student can respond — verbal (cold call, think-pair-share), written (mini-whiteboards, exit slips), or visual (diagrams, gestures).</p>	<p><i>"Everyone sketches the process on your mini-whiteboard... 3,2,1—show."</i></p>
<p>4. Involve Everyone</p> <p>→ Purpose: Gather a true whole-class picture of understanding, not just the confident few.</p>	<p>Don't rely on volunteers. Build a supportive no-opt-out culture with neutral tone, wait time, and consistent routines.</p>	<p><i>"I'll give you 20 seconds to think, then I'll ask three people to explain their reasoning."</i></p>
<p>5. Probe Reasoning</p> <p>→ Purpose: Make students' thought processes visible; catch and correct errors in reasoning.</p>	<p>After an answer, follow up with <i>"why?"</i> or <i>"how do you know?"</i> to surface misconceptions and deepen thinking.</p>	<p><i>"Turn to your neighbour and explain why we subtract here, not add — then I'll pick a few to share."</i></p>
<p>6. Act on the Evidence</p> <p>→ Purpose: Ensure the check changes teaching and learning; improve accuracy and confidence before moving on.</p>	<p>Use what you learn to reteach, clarify, or extend. Without adaptation, CfU is just a box-tick.</p>	<p><i>"I'm seeing some boards with negative signs — pause, let's fix that together before moving on"</i></p>