

Stop Asking “Do You Understand?”

Replace a yes/no comprehension question with evidence of what each learner can actually do.

3 min preparation | Science, Maths and Humanities

Before the lesson

Identify one essential action or idea. Prepare a short task that reveals a likely misconception.

Teach it in four steps

1. Explain or model the idea briefly.
2. Ask everyone to respond privately using a sketch, choice with a reason, worked step or short explanation.
3. Scan the responses for a shared misconception and distinguish language difficulty from conceptual difficulty.
4. Respond to the evidence: model the missing step, clarify a phrase or move on with an extension.

Maths: checking an instruction

Instead of “Does everyone understand simplify?”, show $\frac{6}{8}$ and ask learners to simplify it and explain why the value stays the same.

Teacher: “Show the step you would take first. What changes, and what stays the same?”

Check understanding

Check all responses before selecting volunteers. If learners choose $\frac{3}{4}$ but cannot explain the common factor, revisit the reason behind the procedure.

Fade the support

Use a new example without the model. Let learners select a response format when the format is not the learning goal.

Adapt it across subjects

Science: ask for a force diagram with labelled directions before a written explanation.

Humanities: ask learners to select evidence that supports one claim and explain the choice.

Adjust the language support

A1-A2 access: keep the subject goal; use visuals, a small word bank, pointing or drawing and partner rehearsal. Use a home language to establish meaning where helpful.

B1-B2 extension: ask for fuller explanations, precise subject vocabulary and qualifications. Reduce sentence openings when learners can organise the response independently.

These are starting points, not placement rules. Judge support from the learner’s response to this task; proficiency can differ across skills.