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### STRATEGY THREE: PROGRESS CHECKS

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Maintaining students' attention during class is an important part of supporting student engagement. One strategy that keeps learners focused and teachers informed about progress is integrating comprehension checks and metacognitive checks. Metacognition focuses on a person's self-awareness of his or her own progress through tasks and activities. Another definition from Merriam-Webster's online dictionary is "metacognition is an awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes" (metacognition, n.d.). For example, a student working on pronunciation of the sound *b* might be asked to explain what their mouth is doing as they say the sound *b*. The student might be then asked to explain what the mouth should be doing to correctly pronounce that sound. In doing so, a student gains a level of awareness about his/her own progress.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, we offer simple ways for teachers to check in with learners on their progress and evaluate learner understanding. The metacognitive checks give students a chance to evaluate their own learning as the learning occurs. Both metacognitive and comprehension checks give teachers a chance to assess how learners are feeling while completing a task and where teachers can best offer support. Both types of checks can occur at any time during a lesson, and both require learners to be ready to give feedback; therefore, together they prove useful in promoting learner engagement.

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#### LEVEL

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Any

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#### PREPARATION

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- Take time before class to identify moments in a planned lesson when you want to check in with students. Some examples of places for checks might include: after giving directions, while students are finishing a task, or while students are working through an activity.

- Remember to have other assessments in place. Check-ins are wonderful tools in a teacher's toolbox, but depend entirely on students to self-report their progress. Students might be swayed to respond similarly to their peers in an effort to feel included. Use these checks as they are intended: to promote learner engagement and to offer small insights into learner progress.
- Prepare students to engage in check-ins regularly. Once students have practiced these strategies once or twice, they will be ready and eager to practice them throughout the year.

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## STRATEGIES

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### **Thumbs up/Thumbs down**

When to use: Use this strategy for comprehension checks when giving directions, seeing how much more time is needed to finish a task, or how students feel an activity is going.

Thumbs up/thumbs down is an easy way to check in with students during a lesson. This strategy works well with young learners who are often eager to show their involvement. During group work or individual work time, teachers can pause to check student understanding. Students either give a thumbs up if they feel they are doing well or a thumbs down to indicate that they are having difficulty. For example, while giving directions and explaining an activity, you can periodically stop to ask for a thumbs up/thumbs down to see if students are listening to and following the directions. The teacher might first say, "Everyone is going to take a colored piece of paper out of the bucket. All of the students with the same colored paper will be in one group. If you have a blue piece of paper, all students with blue paper will meet in the blue corner. Thumbs up or thumbs down?" All students give a thumbs up or a thumbs down to show that they understand what is being asked. This offers the teacher a chance to quickly scan the room to see which students are following and which ones aren't. If necessary, the teacher can pause and offer another example to reiterate the instructions before moving on.

### **Scale of 1-5**

When to use: Use this strategy when students are working individually or in small groups to check progress.

The *scale of 1-5* check prompts students to share their progress. This strategy can give teachers insight into the level and comfort at which students feel they are progressing. As students work individually or in a group, ask them to hold up the number of fingers that match how they think they are doing. For example, if students are engaged in an individual reading task, once a few minutes have passed, you can ask, “On a scale of 1 to 5 how easy is this story to read? One means that this is a difficult story and 5 means this is an easy story.” Teachers can then make a note to see who has held up 1-3 fingers and who has held up 4-5 fingers. Those students who held up 1-3 fingers might need extra help. After the teacher checks with the students who find the story difficult, the teacher can ask the other students how they feel about the story and why it seems easy. The *scale of 1-5* serves as a starting point for teachers to hear from students about their own progress and to make adjustments and adaptations to further support learners.

### **Placards**

When to use: Use any time teachers want to see and hear from all learners.

Placards are great additions to students’ materials and are easily made on pieces of paper. They are small signs that students can hold up showing their responses to questions and comprehension checks from teachers. One student might make a couple of placards. One piece of paper might have *YES* written on one side and *NO* written on the other. The yes/no placard can be used to check in during a lesson or review lesson content.

Another piece of paper could have *AGREE* written on one side and *DISAGREE* written on the other side.

Teachers can use the cards to check progress or review content. (Example question: Do verbs come before the subject in a sentence?) The agree/disagree placards can also be used to check metacognition. (Example prompts: I completed the task quickly; I got the results I expected). These are some examples of questions that target learner understanding and give teachers insight on student's feelings on progress.

The comprehension checks shared in this article are by no means exhaustive. Try to create additional ways to check learner comprehension using the materials, resources, and needs of your students as a guide. Check out some of American English's additional resources for designing comprehension checks and integrating metacognitive learning strategies.

[Metacognitive Reading Strategies](#)

[Vocabulary Strategy Work for Advanced Learners of English](#)

[Shaping the Way We Teach English: Module 7: Learning Strategies](#)

[Self-Assessment](#)