

How to check your students understand?

One of the best ways to check that your students understand the language you've been teaching is to use concept checking.

What is concept checking?

Concept checking consists of a variety of methods that teachers use to verify their students have fully understood. The main method teachers use is to ask a set of questions to test the students' comprehension of the target language. The preparation of each concept question is very important. Here are some tips for creating effective concept questions:

- The questions should clarify the form, function or meaning of the language.
- The questions should be easy to understand and contain no new or difficult language. Simple 'Wh' questions and yes/no questions work particularly well.
- The questions should get the students involved in thinking about the basic concept of the target language in regards to tense and time.
- The questions shouldn't contain the target language itself.
- Try to ask as many concept questions as you can to cover the various aspects of the language and to get feedback from as many students as possible.

Avoid asking questions that can be lifted from a text and questions like 'Do you understand?' This will only lead to a 'yes' response from the students and give you no real insight into the students' understanding. It is also helpful to remind students that clearing up misunderstandings are a part of everyday communication. Students shouldn't feel embarrassed about asking for clarification if they don't understand something.

Concept questions vary greatly due to the diversity of the English language. They are not only handy for grammar points and structures, but also for vocabulary, functions and idiomatic expressions. Here are some example concept questions:

Present simple: Harry lives in a one bedroom apartment.

Information question: Who lives in the apartment?

Information question: How many bedrooms are there?

50/50 question: Is the apartment on one floor or two?

Yes/no question: Does Harry live there every day?

Yes/no question: Is this the past, present or future?

Shared experience question: Do you live in a house or apartment?

Life experience question: Have you ever lived in an apartment?

Cultural question: Are apartments popular in your city/country?

Present continuous: The students are taking an exam.

Information question: Who is taking the exam?

Yes/no question: Is the exam finished?

Yes/no question: Is the exam happening now?

'Wh' question: When will the exam finish?

Yes/no question: Is this the past, present or future?

Shared experience question: Do you ever take exams?

Another way to construct concept questions is to reduce the target language to a number of simple statements that describe its meaning. You then turn those statements into questions.

Example: He should have been on-time for work.

Simple statement: Someone told him to be on-time for work.

Simple statement: He wasn't on-time for work.

Yes/no question: Did someone tell him to be on-time for work? Yes.

Yes/no question: Was he on-time for work? No.

If the students answer the questions correctly, it shows they understand the concept. You can then move on to ask other types of concept question.

Example: Shared experience question: Are you always on-time for work?

Concept questions can also be combined with other methods to check understanding. Here are some other possible methods:

- Paraphrasing or summarizing exercises.
- Time lines used in conjunction with concept questions to establish tenses.
- Scales or grades, e.g. adverbs of frequency - always, usually, sometimes, never.
- Pictures that show similar objects e.g. stream/river, garden/park, etc.
- Guided practice or homework assignments to consolidate understanding.
- Translations
- Negative checking, e.g. Do I say 'You was'?
- Games to check students' understanding of vocabulary or grammar, e.g. [Hot Seats](#), [Translation Race](#), etc.

Concept checking can be used at any point during a lesson. It doesn't need to be used to check every language point as most of the time meaning and function should be clear to the students. It is usually most effective after an explanation or at the end of class as a review. Concept checking can also be useful after guided practice if students haven't demonstrated a full understanding of the language.