

44 WAYS to CHECK for UNDERSTANDING



Assess learning and check for understanding in your high school classroom, instantly or with feedback for your students.

If you know a teacher who could benefit from this free resource, feel free to send it to them. Just send them a link to this page:

www.teachertactics.com/understand

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TACTICS
High school teaching strategies

How to Use this Guide

Checking for understanding is so important – it gives you a better idea for how well your students understand the concepts and material you’re teaching them, and is essential to help you adjust your teaching to better meet the needs of your students.

This guide has been created to work for all subjects and grade levels of high school, whether you want to figure out if students are successfully able interpret an English text, understand a new mathematical concept, or conjugate verbs in a foreign language. Have some fun with these creative ideas!

Instant Checks for Understanding

The following checks for understanding can be done at any time during your lesson, require no preparation, and give you an instant response from your students.

1 Thumbs Up Thumbs Down

“Give a thumbs up if you fully understand, and a thumbs down if you’re totally lost. Rotate between a full thumbs up or down to show partial understanding.”

2 Five Fingers

“Put up one to five fingers to show your level of understanding.” *To increase anonymity, ask students to put down their heads before putting up their fingers.*

3 Notes for the Teacher

“Take two minutes to write out what you are most having trouble understanding on a small slip of paper.” *Making notes anonymous may give you more honest feedback from students.*

4 Call out the Teacher

“Anything I didn’t explain well enough?” *More effective than asking “does that make sense?” as it suggests you as the teacher are responsible for learning, not your students.*

5 Circulate and Observe

Walk around the class and observe students as they try questions or activities. See how far they have progressed. You can use this as an opportunity to provide individual feedback.

6 3 Heads Are Better than 1

“Get into groups of 3 and decide what the most difficult concept from this unit is.” *Check in on each group, or ask one person from each group to present to the class.*

7 Stoplight

Create colored cards for student feedback.
Green = Go on, I understand
Yellow = Slow down, I’m a little confused
Red = Stop, I don’t get it!

8 Fast Lane or Slow Lane

“Point down if the lecture or demonstration is going too slowly for you. Point up if it’s going too quickly. Point towards me if it’s going at a good pace.”

Detailed Checks for Understanding

The following checks for understanding take a little more time to set up, but provide you with a more detailed and specific idea about how well your students understand the material you're covering. Many of these options provide a creative way to show understanding that goes beyond answering questions.

9 Cue Card Study Guide

"Create a study guide on the unit we're studying. Fit all of the important information on the front and back of a cue card." (Yes, students may write as small as they wish!)

11 Easy as 1-2-3

"What's 1 question you still have about the material, 2 things you find interesting, and 3 things you've learned?" *Students could share their findings with a partner before handing in.*

13 Seven Words

"In just seven words, how would you explain or describe the concept? Justify why you choose the words you did, and why you think they're the best fit."

15 140 Characters

"Imagine if you had to explain the concept using Twitter. How would you do so in only 140 characters?" *Tell students that they may use abbreviations (and hashtags!) if it helps.*

17 Haiku

"Explain the concept using a haiku poem – a 5 syllable line, 7 syllable line, and another 5 syllable line." *Students may enjoy sharing their haikus with others.*

19 Fixer-Upper

Give an example of a common misconception, incorrect reasoning, or a wrong answer. Ask students to correct the mistake(s) and explain why the original answer is wrong.

10 Mind Map

"Create a mind map with links to all of the concepts you've learned." *Students can create their mind maps on paper or use an online tool like Gliffy (www.gliffy.com)*

12 Simile

"Use an analogy to explain the concept. For example, the concept is similar to _____ because ____." *You may wish to demonstrate with an example related to your course.*

14 Exit Slip

"Before you leave class, I need you to write down your answers to 1-2 quick questions about what we learned today. *These could be either content or opinion-based questions.*

16 6 Seconds

"Imagine if you had to explain the concepts using Vine. How would you do so with only a 6 second presentation?" *Put students in pairs if you wish to save time presenting.*

18 Limerick

"Explain the concept using a limerick, where the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd line of a 5-line poem rhyme." *Demonstrate with your own example to show the rhythm and syllables of a limerick.*

20 Visual Art

"Create a drawing, sketch, or painting that illustrates the concept." *Stress that artistic ability isn't important. Consider putting these illustrations up on your classroom walls!*

21 Study Guide

"Create a study guide for the material we're studying. What are the key points? What's the key vocabulary? What are the biggest takeaways of the unit?"

23 Stream of Consciousness

"Write down all of the questions you have about the material while writing continuously and without putting down your pen." *Collect student responses to review.*

25 Review Questions

"Create review questions about the topic at 3 levels of difficulty: easy, medium, and hard." *You could use these review questions for a review game or review session next class.*

27 Curiosity

"What do you want to learn about this subject?" *Asking this question can engage students along with helping to uncover their misconceptions about the topic.*

29 Comic Strip/Book

"Explain the concept using a haiku poem – a 5 syllable line, 7 syllable line, and another 5 syllable line." *Students will probably enjoy sharing their haikus with others!*

31 Challenge Question

Create a difficult question about your material, then challenge students to solve it. Provide help – make it an open book challenge, allow students to ask you questions, etc.

33 Student Self-Assessment

"Rate your understand of this topic from 1 to 5, and explain why in 2-3 sentences." *Students are generally very honest when it comes to self-assessment.*

22 Compare and Contrast

"Take two concepts that we've learned in this unit. Compare and contrast to identify the similarities and differences between the two ideas."

24 So What?

Give students one or two concepts and ask them to describe why they are important, e.g. importance to the overall course, real-world implications, etc.

26 Confusion Concepts

"Before you leave class, write down your answers to 1-2 quick questions about what we learned today. *These could be either content or opinion-based questions.*

28 Teaching Style

"How would you like to learn about this subject?" *Go beyond lectures, e.g. review questions, articles, case studies, debates, and other activities to teach the content.*

30 Top 5

"Make an entertaining list of the top 5 things you've learned about in this unit." *Encourage students to use humor and creativity when creating their list. They can share them, too!*

32 Questions Question

"What questions do you still have about this topic?" *This encourages students to share what they still don't understand in a positive way (instead of asking "what don't you get?").*

34 Face-Off

"Create a question about the material and try to stump your partner." *Remind students that they need to be able to answer their own question!*

Checks for Understanding with Built-In Feedback

The following checks for understanding provide students with feedback, so that both you and your students know what they understand, and what they still need to work on (in other words, these act as *formative assessment*).

35 Stress Free Pop Quiz

Give students a pop quiz about the material. Make it multiple-choice or short answer to assess quickly. To reduce anxiety, don't count it for marks, just use it as a way to assess.

37 Review Race

Create a review question or exercise and give a small prize to the first 3 students who can complete it correctly. Check each response to provide quick feedback to students.

39 Plickers App

Use the free Plickers app (www.plickers.com) on iOS or Android to use your phone's camera to quickly record multiple-choice responses from students, privately, and with unique IDs.

41 Collect Homework

Instead of doing a homework check, collect homework from students and choose one or two questions to mark or provide feedback to students.

43 Review Game

Play a review game in class (it could be styled like Jeopardy! or a sports game). Encourage participation by only allowing each student to answer a question once.

36 Mini-Conference

Spend 1-2 minutes with each student and ask them about their progress in the unit. Encourage them to ask questions or clarify anything that they're unsure about.

38 Pre-Test

Give students a question similar to what they would expect on a test. Ask them to complete it in a test-like environment (no talking, etc.) Hand back their work with brief comments.

40 Kahoot! App

The free Kahoot! app (www.getkahoot.com) on iOS or Android lets you create quick review games that students can play on their own phones and devices..

42 Progress Check

Create smaller progress due-dates for assignments or content understanding before the final evaluation. Check with students to see if they understand mid-unit.

44 Vocabulary Review

Do a vocabulary review. It could be a mix of recall (e.g. definitions) and recognition (e.g. multiple choice). Go through the answers after students have had a chance to try.

Like what you've read?

You made it to the end of the Teacher Tactics Ways to Check for Understanding! If you like what you've read, here are your next steps:

- 1 Get out into your classroom and put these strategies into practice! Try starting out tomorrow with a new lesson hook, or do a brain break in the middle of your lesson.
- 2 If you know a teacher who could benefit from this free resource, feel free to send it to them. Just send them a link to this page: www.teachertactics.com/understand
- 3 We love getting email! Send a note to hello@teachertactics.com and say "Hey Colin and Michelle, just read through 44 Ways to Check for Understanding and I what I really liked was..." Or you can send us a teaching question like "I really need help with...".
- 4 You can also say hi to Colin on Twitter: [@colindodds](https://twitter.com/colindodds)

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Thanks for reading!
– Colin Dodds & Michelle Davis

