

# Check for Understanding in Virtual Learning

Check for understanding methods can be used to gather formative assessment data and monitor student progress toward skill mastery regardless of the learning environment. While virtual learning environments may offer less frequent opportunities to interact with and observe students throughout a lesson, checks for understanding can still be utilized to inform next steps for instruction. Educators can use this data to make adjustments to instruction (e.g. reteach essential skills, provide graphic organizers to scaffold learning for targeted students, increase use of technology, or review prerequisite knowledge for a concept), provide targeted small group reteaching, and measure student outcomes for goal mastery.

In this guide, you will find:

- **Specific Ideas** for when to use checks for understanding within virtual learning
- **Planning Guidance** for purposeful use of checks for understanding in synchronous and asynchronous instruction
- **Common Strategies** for checks for understanding that can be adapted and applied to virtual learning environments

**Audience:** Special Education and General Education Teachers, Para-Educators and Administrators

## When to Use Checks for Understanding

Checks for Understanding (CFUs) are mini, formative assessments intended to inform teachers on student mastery of learning objectives. The results of CFUs guide educators to make mid-course corrections to whole group instruction, small group instruction and targeted supports. Providing targeted and actionable feedback to students about their progress early and often yields high results for student learning and creates space and time for students to ask for and receive assistance with concepts not yet fully acquired.

**Educators may use checks for understanding at a variety of points throughout instruction.** While not exhaustive, the following list provides ideas and inspiration for specific instructional applications of check for understanding strategies within and across virtual learning settings:

- During guided practice, educators use opportunities to respond, such as cold calling or whiteboarding, to engage students individually or as a group. These checks for understanding measure readiness to engage with concepts independently during self-directed learning tasks.
- At the start or end of a daily lesson to assess mastery of skills previously taught or prerequisite skill knowledge. Skills can be assessed through admit and exit tickets or online forms and surveys.
- Opportunities for self-directed learning reflections where students self-assess their progress, mastery and confidence with a concept.
- Additional opportunities to respond, such as chat responses, verbal whip arounds, choral responses, or cued retells might be used with students throughout a lesson as ways to encourage self-monitoring and peer-guided checks for understanding.

**Consider using checks for understanding to progress monitor student IEP goals.** Progress monitoring may be required for students with IEPs, and can be useful for students currently receiving interventions. Checks for understanding can be implemented to assess student mastery of core course content, as well as progress toward a variety of IEP goals. A few things to pause and consider when progress monitoring include: which students are being targeted, what is the intended use of the data, which tests will be administered, and the time and logistics for teachers or coordinators to administer those assessments. Additional guidance on virtual progress monitoring is available in [this guide](#).

## Strategically Plan Checks for Understanding

Sometimes checks for understanding are implemented in the moment when a teacher identifies an unexpected need for more information about student readiness to advance in a lesson, or when observing a disconnect in student engagement and comprehension of a learning objective. In most cases, however, educators can anticipate the places in a lesson where checks for understanding might be administered in order to guide in-the-moment and future instruction. Some commonly implemented strategies are listed below; however, educators should prioritize strategies and systems already in place and familiar to students in their classrooms.

Instructional Purpose	Virtual / Live Lesson	Asynchronous Lesson / Assignment	Beginning or End of lesson formative assessments
<b>CFU Strategies to Consider</b>	<p>Opportunities to Respond (Cold Call, Whiteboards / Show Me, Chat Response, Whiparounds)</p> <p>Self-Assessment (e.g. Fist-to-Five)</p> <p>Admit/Exit Tickets</p> <p>Games (e.g. Kahoot, Jeopardy, etc)</p>	<p>Discussion Boards</p> <p>Show Me Strategy</p> <p>Adaptive Assessments</p> <p>Daily/Weekly Self Assessments</p> <p>“Why is this wrong?” / Error Correction</p>	<p>Adaptive Assessments</p> <p>Self-Assessment (e.g. rubrics, google forms)</p> <p>Formalize Formative Assessments (e.g. quizzes)</p> <p>“Why is this wrong?” / Error Correction</p>

**For formal formative assessments used as checks for understanding,** consider what tool will most consistently and reliably provide the data you are seeking from students. If possible, use assessment types and systems students are already familiar with to avoid additional barriers to student engagement. To make sure you effectively measure what you seek to measure, you should backwards plan assessments from the scope and sequence of instruction as well as the constraints on the assessment (e.g. time, number of questions, response type). Determine the parameters of the assessment before you begin creating it so you do not have to make frequent changes or readminister assessments to students due to invalid or unreliable data. Best practice is to have two-to-three questions per standard being assessed for mastery.

## Strategies to Adapt and Apply to a Virtual Classroom

Some common strategies employed in the traditional classroom setting can be implemented with minimal adaptations to the virtual setting. In other cases, strategies might be adapted to allow asynchronous learning options for students to answer questions, have discussions and assess their learning. Tools like polls and self-assessment strategies can be used to check for understanding and lead educators to identify additional need for support for student learning. Exit tickets and short quizzes allow for assessment in content mastery and can lend themselves to progress monitoring of IEP goals. Fun and interactive options on [Padlet](#), [Screencastify](#), [Flipgrid](#) and [Kahoot](#) can build in joy and community building while collecting data on student learning. While some educators may be ready to incorporate new tools and platforms for assessment into instructional practices, it is not required in order to gather meaningful data on student mastery of learning objectives. To begin, start with strategies that are familiar to the classroom context and students, then build on assessment tools and strategies from there with support from colleagues, professional development opportunities and personal learning experiences exploring new tools.

### Strategies highlighted in this section include:

[Cold Call](#)

[Whiteboards/Show Me](#)

[Adaptive Assessments / Admit and Exit Tickets](#)

[Self-Assessments](#)

[“Why are these wrong?” / Error Correction](#)

[Kahoots, Jeopardy & Online Games to Assess Learning](#)

Cold Call	
<b>What it is:</b>	<p>Teacher calls on students to answer questions during instruction. Best done by stating the question first, then calling on students. A variety of techniques can be used, including: name sticks or name cards, random calls (best paired with a tracking tool to ensure equity)</p> <p><i>Tip:</i> As students respond, connect to previous comments and connect them to current ones. Make use of language for adding on or disagreeing with the thinking of others, modeling for students that listening to peers is valued, and even after a student’s been called on, he or she is part of the continued conversation and class thinking</p>
<b>When to use it:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Direct</b> instruction settings (whole class or small group)</li> <li>→ <b>Asynchronous</b> instruction / Independent work: discussion boards</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptations</b>	<p>Teachers may need to recreate equity lists or name stick sets for use at home for use with students in face-to-face instruction. For asynchronous learning, teachers could assign one or two students per question for a task and allow peers to comment or add on to ideas in a discussion board type setting</p>
<b>Differentiation for Diverse Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Scaffold</b> questions from simple to increasingly complex, probing for deeper explanations or offering sentence frames for diverse learning needs</li> <li>→ <b>Prime</b> select students who may need think time or have high levels of anxiety (ex: “X, I am going to come to you next to answer question 2)</li> </ul>

### Whiteboards / Show Me Strategy

<b>What it is:</b>	Students have small white boards and write their ideas/thinking/ answers down to answer a question or show work for a given task. When prompted, students hold up their boards for teacher and/or peer scanning.
<b>When to use it:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Direct</b> instruction settings (whole class or small group)</li> <li>→ <b>Asynchronous</b> instruction / independent work: have students post or submit a photo of their work online to show their progress or answer to a task. Remind them to show what they know and focus on the process, not the outcome.</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptations</b>	Use paper, notepads or interactive whiteboards if students do not have access to a whiteboard at home. Some online learning tools have digital whiteboards for student use during instruction. Examples include <a href="#">Padlets</a> and <a href="#">Flipgrid</a> .
<b>Differentiation for Diverse Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Provide</b> sentence frames or fill in the blank options to scaffold for students</li> <li>→ <b>Encourage</b> students to provide partial responses to show their thinking so far and reinforce effort towards mastery (i.e. <i>"I can see [name] was on the way to the answer. Great job getting out your thoughts!"</i>)</li> <li>→ <b>Partner</b> students with a peer if needed and available for instruction</li> </ul>

### Adaptive Assessments / Admit and Exit Tickets

<b>What it is:</b>	<p>Before or after completing an activity, have students answer a set of questions to check their understanding. Admit and exit tickets are given to determine a student's readiness for the next step or assess learning from a lesson, while adaptive assessments are given at a differentiated pace. Admit tickets can be used as a pre-assessment for new content or measure of prerequisite skill mastery for content being presented in the upcoming lesson.</p> <p>Tip: Create formative assessments and pair with a poll for student reflection. CommonSense Media's <a href="#">guide</a> is a great reference for making formative assessments student centered.</p>
<b>When to use it:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Asynchronous</b> instruction / independent work</li> <li>→ <b>1:1</b> instruction</li> <li>→ <b>Direct</b> instruction settings (whole class or small group)</li> <li>→ <b>Peer group</b> learning / project assessment</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptations</b>	<p>Many educators would provide this as a half sheet page for in-person completion. Online, try :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Assigning students a set of short answer questions after watching a video clip</li> <li>→ Creating a short quiz on a form or survey following a direct instruction lesson</li> <li>→ Polling students with a daily question</li> <li>→ Short formative assessments as a pre and post lesson measure of mastery</li> <li>→ Have students record a video or audio response to summarize key learning</li> </ul>
<b>Differentiation for Diverse Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Create</b> differentiated versions of an assessment</li> <li>→ <b>Offer multiple modalities</b> for response (i.e. writing, oral response, visual representation)</li> <li>→ <b>Administer</b> check for understanding assessments in 1:1 settings and provide verbal encouragement</li> </ul>

	<p>→ <b>Adaptations</b>, including accommodations, modifications and aids for learning should be offered to students. Remind students to use text-to-speech to have questions read aloud to them as needed, or offer a link for an online calculator if students do not have access to one easily at home (i.e on a phone or tablet device)</p>
<b>Implications for Progress Monitoring</b>	<p>Exit tickets can be a daily measure of progress toward goals if aligned with IEP goal skills. Adaptive assessments given weekly or biweekly can act as checkpoints for mastery toward a standard or skill, and might contain questions aligned to content standards and IEP goals to serve more than one purpose.</p> <p>These check for understanding strategies are ideal for targeting goals where students can demonstrate skill in 10-30 minutes (i.e. 4-5 math question quiz, short reading passage of 1-3 pages in length), such as math computation, answering inferential questions with text evidence, or creating an outline of main points from a text.</p>

Self Assessments	
<b>What it is:</b>	<p>Self assessment strategies are used for students to quickly measure and communicate their understanding of a concept. This is typically done before starting independent work or moving on to the next section of a lesson. Numerous strategies are available. If one is already established for students, use what is familiar. If needing to introduce a self assessment check for understanding, try one or more of the following:</p> <p><b>Fist to Five:</b> Have students hold up their hands to respond to 5 = ready, 3= need support soon, 0 = stuck or not ready</p> <p><b>Thumbs Up, Down, To the Side:</b> Students show a “thumbs up” if they are ready to continue, a “thumbs to the side” if they need some help or are somewhat confused, and a “thumbs down” if they are stuck or do not understand the information or directions</p> <p><b>Stop Light (Red, Yellow, Green):</b> Students have red, yellow, and green objects accessible (e.g. popsicle sticks, poker chips, cards), and when prompted to reflect on a learning target or readiness for a task, they place the color on their desk that describes their comfort level or readiness (red: stuck or not ready; yellow: need support soon; green: ready to start). Teachers target their support for the reds first, then move to yellows and greens. Students change their colors as needed to describe their status.</p>
<b>When to use it:</b>	<p>→ <b>Direct</b> instruction settings (whole class or small group)</p> <p>→ <b>Asynchronous learning</b> (<a href="#">see Google Classroom Poll example</a>)</p>
<b>Adaptations</b>	<p>Students and educators may need to get creative about representing the three levels. Ideally, students will have paper with three colors available. If not, some learning platforms and video conferencing platforms have icons for students to show thumbs up and down on the screen</p> <p>Send students to break out rooms. Tell students who need help immediately (red) to return to the main session to work with the teacher. Using an announcement to the group (i.e. “In 5 minutes I will invite students who are stuck to meet me in the main room”), students who need help soon (yellow) can join after the teacher gets the red group settled.</p> <p>When asynchronous, have students complete self assessment at learning checkpoints to</p>

	determine if they need to join a meet-up session or office hours for support
<b>Differentiation for Diverse Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Schedule</b> checkpoints in advance for students who struggle with anxiety or task-attentiveness. Messaging should indicate a desire to check-in on progress and not an assumption students will need help or not understand the work.</li> <li>→ <b>Use privately</b> as needed. If students with emotional needs have difficulty responding in front of peers, use the chat box or have students respond to a poll where only the teacher can view individual names for responses</li> <li>→ <b>Individualize.</b> Some students may benefit from using this check for understanding more frequently with the teacher. Setting up a private way for the student to ask for help or take a break, such as using the chat feature in live lessons or sending a message by email or text can encourage students to monitor and advocate for their needs</li> <li>→ <b>Adapt</b> self assessment tools for students to measure their time on-task</li> </ul>
<b>Implications for Progress Monitoring</b>	<p>Self assessment strategies can be used to monitor student goals for self-regulation and coping skills.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Self-monitoring and self-advocacy goals can be measured with teacher charted data, such as tallies for measuring student use of strategies to seek support. Data can also be compared to student assessment results to determine how well students advocated for support with instruction within a lesson and assessed their understanding for learning.</li> <li>→ Self assessment tools might be adapted to have students chart data for specific goal areas, such as on-task behavior or using coping strategies when frustrated</li> </ul>

<b>“Why are these wrong?” / Error Correction</b>	
<b>What it is:</b>	Provide several incorrect statements or answers to questions, often common errors made or misconceptions students may need to review and revise. Have students review each question to develop an explanation for why the response is incorrect, and provide a correction to the response.
<b>When to use it:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Asynchronous</b> instruction / Independent work</li> <li>→ <b>1:1</b> instruction</li> <li>→ <b>Direct</b> instruction settings (whole class or small group)</li> <li>→ <b>Peer group</b> learning / project assessment or group work</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptations</b>	Can be assigned for students to complete on their own, with a partner or in small groups in breakout rooms. Might also be used as a group project or assignment for students to schedule with one another or collaborate on throughout the week.
<b>Differentiation for Diverse Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Scaffold</b> questions from simple to increasingly complex to provide students various entry points for participation</li> <li>→ <b>Provide</b> sentence frames or fill-in-the-blank options for diverse learning needs</li> <li>→ <b>Partner</b> students with a peer or in small groups for additional practice</li> </ul>

## Kahoots, Jeopardy & Online Games to Assess Learning

<b>What it is:</b>	Online game based learning tools offer multiple choice or open answer) questions for students to answer on their own or in teams. Other options available include team trivia to answer questions and earn points as a team, “Reverse Game Show” where students write questions with one word answers for vocabulary practice and then present them to their “audience,” or “Tournaments of Champions” where students face-off in small groups to get to a champion bracket.
<b>When to use it:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Direct</b> instruction settings (whole class or small group)</li> <li>→ <b>Peer group</b> learning / project assessment or group work</li> <li>→ <b>Asynchronous</b> instruction / Independent work</li> <li>→ <b>1:1</b> instruction / differentiated pathways</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptations</b>	<p>If teaching asynchronously, discussion board trivia can be offered as a fun way to engage students. Kahoots can be created by teachers and scheduled for use with peers and family members for remote learning.</p> <p>Kahoot has a <a href="#">distance learning guide</a> available for reference and support.</p>
<b>Differentiation for Diverse Learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ <b>Turn off</b> the timer to reduce anxiety on challenges and self-paced games, or extend time to allow students additional think time</li> <li>→ <b>Integrate</b> games for learning to assess mastery and engage small groups of students for a targeted skill. Examples include articulation goals for speech, scenario cards for social thinking, and fact or opinion trivia with reading goals</li> <li>→ <b>Differentiate</b> question levels and response options. Offer multiple choice options or clues for questions for student reference. Kahoot allows different question levels</li> </ul>
<b>Implications for Progress Monitoring</b>	<p>When played live with students, accuracy of responses to questions can inform educators about mastery of groups of students. Individual student responses can be tracked for accuracy, such as having students keep a scorecard of their responses and overall score.</p> <p>Playing games in peer settings can also help monitor progress on goals for collaboration, social problem solving and speech language goals.</p>

## Additional Resources

[Expeditionary Learning’s Check For Understanding](#) (via EngageNY)

[Ashly Locklin Instructional Coaching Blog: 50 Ways to Check for Understanding in a Virtual Classroom](#)

[Vedamo Article: Types of Assessments in the Virtual Classroom](#)

## Final Word

With limited opportunities to interact with and observe students learning in front of them, educators around the country are looking for actionable ways to quickly and accurately measure student learning throughout instruction. Checks for understanding allow educators to adjust instructional approaches and target students requiring assistance for improved learning outcomes. In many ways, checks for understanding remain unchanged in purpose and approach from traditional classroom models. Considering **when to use checks for understanding** and **how to use them throughout instruction in virtual school** is essential to collect

meaningful data for swift action and results, as well as **adapting common strategies** to fit the needs of learners in your virtual spaces.

## Appendix

### Sample Google Classroom CFU

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Select the answer that best represents your level of mastery today:

- I understand the material and do not need any help
  - I have some clarifying questions. I need a quick check in (join a check-in group during office hours or send me a message)
  - I need some help getting started or understanding the assignment (join a small group lesson or send me a message with your needs)
  - I haven't had a chance to start today. I will update you with a quick email if I have questions.
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#### Class comments



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