

The 60-Second Evidence Pause

Checking understanding before drawing a conclusion

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Developing practice guide

Use the pause

1. **Hold the goal:** What thinking was the task meant to reveal?
2. **Examine what is there:** What did the student actually contribute, and with what help?
3. **Choose the next response:** Does existing work answer the question? If not, teach or offer a relevant way to respond while preserving the goal.
4. **Keep the claim proportionate:** What can be concluded now, and what remains open?

A brief pause can guide the next move. A consequential decision may require more evidence and the fuller protocol.

A student hesitates after a question. The teacher waits, offers a hint, simplifies the task, or turns to someone else. These are ordinary decisions made while a lesson is moving, often with the intention of helping. Yet each decision may also carry an interpretation of what the student knows.

The 60-Second Evidence Pause creates a brief space to examine that interpretation before it shapes the next opportunity. Silence or an incomplete answer can leave several explanations open. The student may need teaching, clearer directions, language support, more time, or another way to respond. The first response alone may not tell the teacher which is needed.

The question at the center

“Am I seeing the limits of the student’s understanding, or the limits of the conditions under which I asked that understanding to appear?”

Keep both possibilities open; they can also occur together. The pause takes about a minute of the teacher’s attention. The student’s response and any follow-up may take longer. It is an invitation to gather more useful evidence, not a deadline for the student to speak.

1. Hold the thinking goal

Name exactly what the student was being asked to do: compare, justify, infer, solve, or explain. Decide what a response would need to contain before deciding whether the student has demonstrated it.

If the goal is to explain a character's choice using the text, finding a relevant sentence is a useful beginning, but it does not yet show how that sentence supports an explanation. Keep that relationship in view when offering another way to respond.

Ask: "What thinking still needs to be present, even if the form of the answer changes?" This helps distinguish support for expression from a change in what is being assessed.

2. Examine what is there

Describe the situation before explaining the student. Was the question asked immediately after a transition? Did it require an answer in English, without preparation, in front of the whole group? Were the directions clear, and could the student access the materials? Note any prompting or help already provided.

A useful observation might be: "No spoken answer during whole-group questioning; two details were marked in the text." This records what is available to examine. It does not establish whether the student understood the question, felt anxious, needed vocabulary, or had formed an interpretation.

Examine any relevant writing, drawing, model, or other contribution already available against the learning goal before asking the student to respond again. If a question remains, a brief private check can help: "Would you like more time, or would writing help you show your idea?" Listen to the student's preference without requiring an explanation of the silence, and keep ordinary accommodations and communication supports available.

3. Choose the next response

When existing work answers the question, use it to inform the judgment and choose the next teaching move; another performance is unnecessary. If further evidence is needed, change one main condition that is not essential to the learning goal where practical. Offer preparation time, a private response, writing, drawing, a model built with materials, or a familiar language that can be interpreted reliably. Choose a route the student can use; drawing and writing can introduce demands of their own.

Before offering the adjustment, ask: "Will this response still show the thinking the task requires?" Pointing to an answer may reveal a choice, but a task requiring justification still needs a reason. A diagram needs to show the relevant relationship, not simply contain the right labels.

Teacher language

- "Write your idea first. Include the reason for your answer."
- "Show me with a drawing, and show how the parts connect."
- "Point to the evidence you used. Then show how it supports your idea."
- "Rehearse with your partner first. I'll come back to hear your explanation."

Keep needed teaching and communication support available, and describe what they contributed. A prompt read aloud may make the task accessible without supplying the reasoning; a worked answer or a peer's explanation may supply part of the response. Record that difference so the account shows what the student contributed and what the help provided.

4. Keep the claim proportionate

Return to the same learning goal and examine the existing work or any further response. More speech, a calmer manner, or greater willingness to join may be worth noticing, but none alone demonstrates the intended understanding. After partner rehearsal, distinguish the student's own reasoning from what the partner supplied. Request a further response only when it is needed to answer a remaining question about the target.

If the response demonstrates the target, build on that evidence and offer an appropriate next challenge. If a specific misunderstanding appears, teach that part. If the response remains incomplete, check the directions and language demands, provide needed instruction, and choose a further opportunity that could clarify the question.

A stronger second response can require revising an earlier judgment. It does not, by itself, establish why the first response was limited. Preparation, new teaching, practice, assistance, or differences between tasks may have contributed. Keep the conclusion close to what was actually shown.

A classroom example

Constructed example for illustration; not a report of intervention results.

During a discussion, a teacher asks why a character refuses an invitation and requests evidence from the story. A student marks two sentences but offers no spoken explanation. Before replacing the question with an easier one, the teacher invites a written response: "Explain why you think the character refused, and connect your explanation to a detail in the text."

The student writes that the character expects rejection and explains how a sentence about an earlier exclusion supports that interpretation. The teacher can now examine the inference and its connection to the text. If those are sound, the response provides evidence of that reasoning in writing. It has not yet demonstrated oral explanation or established why the student was silent.

A useful note would be: "Supported an inference about the character with a relevant detail in writing, without a model answer. Oral explanation was not assessed. Continue text-based inference work and offer private rehearsal when oral discussion is a separate learning goal."

If the student instead copies a sentence without explaining its relevance, teach and check that connection. The pause should lead to the instruction the evidence calls for.

Using the pause across PK-12

PK-2: Group objects by a rule

A child sorts toy animals but gives no explanation aloud. Offer another animal: “Where would this one go? Show me what makes it fit.” Look for a consistent sorting rule in the child’s placements, pointing, or explanation. One placement alone may leave the rule unclear.

Grades 3-5: Compare fractions and justify the comparison

A student does not explain whether $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the same whole is larger. Invite a drawing or written explanation. Check that the wholes are equal in size and the reasoning addresses the size of their equal parts. A circled answer alone does not show that reasoning.

Grades 6-8: Explain a relationship in science

A student gives no oral explanation of evaporation and condensation. Invite a labeled diagram with arrows. Check whether it accurately represents the changes from liquid water to water vapor and back, including the role of heating and cooling when that is part of the goal.

Grades 9-12: Evaluate competing claims using evidence

A student remains quiet in a seminar. Offer a private response to the same question. Examine whether the response weighs evidence and addresses a competing claim. Record what it shows about evaluation without treating it as evidence of a spoken contribution to the seminar.

Keep support and the learning goal together

When speaking itself is the goal, retain supported oral practice and the relevant criteria. Another response may reveal content knowledge without demonstrating spoken-language proficiency. Do not wait for repeated unsuccessful attempts before providing needed teaching, accommodations, or consultation. If concerns persist, share specific observations with the family and relevant school staff.

Practice basis and limits

This developing routine organizes familiar teaching practices into a brief check on interpretation. CAST’s guidance supports varied media when a particular medium is not essential to the goal; it does not validate this routine. The pause is not an assessment or diagnostic instrument.

CAST (2024). Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, consideration 5.1: Use multiple media for communication. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/expression-communication/multiple-media/>

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