

When participation needs a closer look

Practical tools for multilingual learning, participation, and educational evidence

Iryna Liusik, MA

Begin with the question in front of you.

SEE-NAME-RESPOND (PDF page 3)

Participation is easy to miss. Read online

The 60-Second Evidence Pause (PDF page 9)

A response is being interpreted too quickly. Read online

The Landing Spot Routine (PDF page 13)

Joining the room is difficult. Read online

The Visibility Ladder (PDF page 20)

Participation differs across occasions. Read online

Evidence Before Judgment (PDF page 29)

A classroom note may shape the next decision. Read online

The complete guides include fillable observation, arrival, participation, and evidence records. The one-page Evidence Before Judgment action card follows this page and is also available separately. The page references above count from the beginning of this combined PDF; each guide retains its own printed page numbers.

These are developing practice resources, not validated assessments or diagnostic instruments. Retain the author credit when sharing. Keep completed records in the secure workflow required by your school.

Evidence Before Judgment

Keep the learning goal, response, and help with the conclusion.

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1. Target

What learning is being examined, and what decision might follow? Identify whether speaking, speed, or independence is part of the goal.

2. Conditions

What were the task, language, response mode, audience, time, and assistance? Retain details that change how the response should be interpreted.

3. Trace

What did the learner actually say, write, choose, construct, or leave incomplete? Examine the response against the criterion.

4. Review existing evidence first

If existing work resolves the question, use it to correct or qualify the account. If a question remains, offer a relevant opportunity while preserving the target. Record all help, new teaching, and changes in demand.

5. Judgment and next action

Retain, revise, or defer the conclusion according to the available evidence. Continue appropriate teaching, support, and worthwhile challenge. Consult when needed; a completed comparison is not a prerequisite for help.

A compact record

On [date / task], the learner [actual contribution], with [relevant conditions and assistance]. This supports [bounded conclusion]. It does not yet establish [remaining question]. Next: [teaching, opportunity, or consultation].

A developing practice aid, not a validated assessment or diagnostic instrument. Use the full guide and comparison record when the decision needs more documentation.

<https://irynaliusik.com/teacher-resources/evidence-before-judgment/>

SEE-NAME-RESPOND

A 3-step framework for understanding quiet participation

Iryna Liusik, MA
Developing practice framework

At a glance

1. SEE what is already happening.
2. NAME it neutrally and precisely.
3. RESPOND by changing one condition.

This framework helps teachers notice participation before it becomes public speech and respond in ways that protect dignity, reduce pressure, and strengthen belonging. It is designed for students whose thinking may be present long before they are ready to show it aloud, especially multilingual learners and students who are quiet, cautious, or easily misread.

1 SEE

Notice before you judge.

Choose one student and observe for about three minutes during play, a lesson, discussion, partner work, or a transition. Slow down and notice what is already happening before deciding what it means.

Posture. Is the student turned toward the activity or angled away? Does their posture change between the whole group and partner work?

Eyes. Do they look toward the speaker, the materials, or a peer before responding? Notice changes without requiring eye contact.

Distance. Do they stay near the group without joining? Do they move closer during play or work with a familiar peer?

Hands and objects. Do they grip a pencil or toy, arrange materials, point, build, or write? Does an idea appear in their work before it appears aloud?

Response patterns. Do they speak privately but stay quiet in the group? Begin a response, then stop? What changes with more time or a familiar language?

What matters is not only whether the student speaks, but when, where, and under what conditions participation becomes possible.

No single cue tells you what a student feels or understands. Compare moments and listen to the student before drawing conclusions.

2 NAME

Describe what you see, neutrally and precisely.

Write one short, factual sentence about what happened. Keep it neutral and free of labels. At this point, you are still gathering evidence.

What a factual note sounds like

- "Stood beside the group and handed a peer two blocks."
- "Wrote an answer and shared it with a partner; did not speak to the class."
- "Moved closer during small-group work and pointed to a picture when asked."
- "Recorded two pieces of evidence; passed when invited to answer aloud."

Words such as shy, disengaged, defiant, not ready, or refuses add an interpretation. A specific observation leaves room to find out more.

Let the student know you noticed

If appropriate, reflect what you saw back to the student privately, in a simple and respectful way.

"You had something written down. That matters."

"I noticed you shared an idea with your partner."

"You don't have to rush. I'm still interested in your thinking."

This tells the student something important:

I see your participation, even when it does not arrive in its most public form.

Quiet contributions are easy to miss when a classroom counts only fluent speech. Naming what actually happened gives those contributions a place in the teacher's understanding of the student.

3 RESPOND

Lower the pressure, not the thinking.

For the next lesson or classroom moment, choose one thoughtful adjustment that makes it easier for the student's thinking to show. Keep the task's thinking goal in view.

Change the participation route

- Let the student draw, build, gesture, or write before speaking. Allow a familiar language when useful.

- Invite them to point to evidence or start with one part, then build toward the explanation the task requires.

"Write it first, then we can talk." "Show me where you found it."

Change the social setting

- Offer a familiar partner, a smaller group, or private rehearsal before whole-class sharing.
- Agree on how the contribution will be shared. Offer a role tied to the task, such as finding evidence or collecting questions.

"Tell your partner, and I'll come back."

Change the teacher's stance

- Use a calm tone and allow time. Sit or stand nearby rather than over the student.
- Narrate the task, not the silence. Avoid repeated prompting, public attention to hesitation, or comparisons with other students.

"You don't have to say it perfectly." "We can build it together."

Return to the student

Did participation become easier? What thinking can you now see? Build on what the student shows. If understanding remains unclear, check directions and language demands, teach or scaffold what is missing, and revisit.

When speaking itself is the goal: keep supported oral practice in the plan. Another response route may reveal content knowledge; it does not by itself demonstrate spoken-language proficiency.

Why the three steps belong together

An answer can tell us something about what a student understands, but it also reflects the circumstances in which they were asked to respond. SEE-NAME-RESPOND keeps those circumstances in view. It helps the teacher notice a contribution, describe it without guessing its cause, and decide what opportunity or support should follow.

For many students, speaking in school is not only a language task. It also involves making an idea public. The framework keeps the depth of understanding separate from the ease of expression, without presuming that every quiet response conceals understanding.

Classroom examples

The form changes with age. The three steps stay the same.

PK-2

Group objects by a rule.

SEE A child groups toy animals without explaining aloud.

NAME "Placed four animals in two groups; gave no spoken explanation."

RESPOND Offer another animal: "Where would this one go? Show me what makes it fit." Look for a consistent sorting rule.

Grades 3-5

Infer a character's motive using evidence.

SEE A student marks story details but stays quiet during discussion.

NAME "Underlined two details; gave no spoken answer about the character's choice."

RESPOND Invite a written or drawn inference linked to a detail and check whether it explains the connection. If that relationship remains unclear, offer a private opportunity to explain through a suitable mode; another response is unnecessary when the existing work already answers the question.

Grades 6-8

Compare two mathematical strategies.

SEE A student completes two methods but gives no spoken comparison.

NAME "Solved the problem in two ways; did not explain how the methods compare."

RESPOND Invite annotations, then partner rehearsal. Look for a meaningful similarity or difference between the methods.

Grades 9-12

Evaluate competing claims using sources.

SEE A student annotates both sources but does not join the seminar.

NAME "Made notes on two sources; made no spoken contribution to the discussion."

RESPOND Offer time to write an evaluation with evidence. Agree on a way to share it. Check whether it weighs the evidence and addresses a competing claim.

Try it in the next class

Choose one student and one familiar classroom moment. Observe for about three minutes, write one neutral sentence, and choose one thoughtful adjustment. Return to the student to examine what followed, including moments when participation stayed the same or became harder.

Record the task, response mode, audience, and any prompting, modeling, translation, or peer help. A contribution can be worth acknowledging while leaving part of the learning goal unassessed.

What to reconsider

Notice whether rapid questioning, repeated prompting, public comparisons, or correction during a difficult moment is making a response harder to offer. Rehearsal, private response, and a manageable first step remain options, not a requirement that every learner follow the same path.

How is this student already participating, and what would make that participation easier to extend?

A completed record: an ordinary classroom moment

Constructed example. The purpose is to show how a brief record can preserve an observation without deciding what caused it.

Task and learning goal: In a grade 5 science lesson, explain how a material’s properties make it suitable for a particular use.

SEE: During group discussion, learner S4 pointed to the aluminum foil and wrote “bends without breaking” beside it. No explanation of its use was recorded. The teacher had asked everyone to choose a material; no model answer had been supplied.

NAME: “S4 selected aluminum foil and identified flexibility as a property. The connection between that property and the proposed use has not yet been explained.”

RESPOND: Keep the reasoning goal and invite a written or private explanation: “How would that property help with this use?” Provide teaching if the relationship remains unclear.

After the adjustment: S4 wrote, “You can bend it around the food to cover it.” The prompt invited the connection but did not supply it. This supports a property-use connection for this example, while transfer to another material remains open.

Next instructional opportunity: Ask the class to examine a different material and explain whether its properties fit the intended use. Continue opportunities for oral explanation when speaking is a learning goal.

Observation record

Use the record below for one student and one classroom moment. Describe what happened, what you changed, what became available, and what you will teach, check, or offer next. Keep completed records private.

SEE-NAME-RESPOND Observation Record

Iryna Liusik, MA | Record 1 of 1

Use a learner code and keep completed records private. Use brief entries; for longer notes, use the online record and print it. This practice record is not a scored assessment.

Learner code, grade, and date

Use a code rather than a name.

Task and learning goal

What was the student being asked to do?

SEE: what happened

Include setting, response mode, language, and any prompting or peer help.

NAME: one factual sentence

Describe the observed moment without labeling the child.

RESPOND: one planned adjustment

Keep the thinking goal in view.

After the adjustment

What changed, if anything? What evidence became available? What remains unclear?

Next step

What will you teach, check, or offer next?

The 60-Second Evidence Pause

Checking understanding before drawing a conclusion

Iryna Liusik, MA
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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The Landing Spot Routine

A calm way for quiet students to enter the classroom

Iryna Liusik, MA
Developing practice routine

At a glance

1. Offer a familiar place.
2. Look around together.
3. Help the student choose a first activity.
4. Remain available as they join.

Some students walk into class ready to talk. Others pause at the door, holding a backpack like a safety anchor, unsure of how to join the room. For a multilingual learner or a student getting to know an unfamiliar classroom, a little time to look around may make the first step easier.

The Landing Spot Routine offers a predictable, low-pressure way to start the day. Set aside about two minutes, using a place already available in the room. Some students will need more time or a different kind of support. The purpose is to offer a manageable way to enter and choose what comes next, without making speech the price of joining.

Quietness alone does not tell a teacher whether a student feels worried, is processing language, prefers to observe, or needs help with something else. Begin with a welcome, remain curious, and use what the student and family share to adapt the routine.

What You Will Need

Choose one accessible place near the entrance, within the supervised classroom and clear of the doorway. No special purchase is needed. Depending on the room and the student, the place might be:

- a small rug square;
- a cushion or familiar chair;
- a marked space on the floor;
- a standing place beside a desk or another agreed arrival point.

Keep the location consistent when it remains useful. If it must change, show the student the new place before arrival where possible. The spot is an invitation, not a required seat, a time-out, or a place to wait until the student performs a greeting.

Step 1: Introduce the Spot

On the first morning, greet the student without a series of questions. Offer a simple phrase: “First, we can sit here together. Then we look around.” If sitting does not suit the student, offer standing nearby or going straight to an activity.

Stay beside them for about a minute, if that is welcome, and slowly draw attention to what is available: “The blocks are open today.” “The art table is ready.” “I see books on the carpet.” Pause between comments so the student can look, point, ask, or simply take in the room.

There is no request for speech. You are offering orientation, not demand, and making the next step clearer. A gesture, a picture, a familiar language, or a short written choice may make that invitation easier to understand.

Step 2: Fade Your Support

When the student seems familiar with the routine, offer a little more space while remaining available. Instead of sitting together, sit or stand nearby. Keep the sequence recognizable: “First, you can settle here. Then we look around.”

Your presence becomes lighter, but the welcome stays the same. Ask or show the student how to request your company again. There is no day by which independence must appear; some students may choose the spot quickly, while others may prefer company for longer or decide that another arrival routine works better.

If the student begins to hesitate more, check what has changed. A different adult, activity, language demand, or peer interaction may matter. Returning to closer support is a response to the moment, not a loss of progress.

Step 3: Let the Routine Become Familiar

As the student looks around and considers joining, you might notice shoulders lowering, eyes moving toward an activity, a hand loosening around a backpack, or a step toward materials. These are observations to explore, not proof of an internal state. A student may also be ready to join without showing any of these changes.

Offer a choice the student can act on: “Books or blocks?” “Would you like to begin here or at the table?” Allow a response through pointing, movement, a communication device, or words. If the student moves toward an activity, help make the entry possible rather than asking for a spoken explanation first.

Instead of praising talking, name the participation privately and naturally: “You looked around and chose blocks.” That response tells the student that a choice has been noticed, even when it arrives without words.

Teacher Language

Simple scripts that may help

- “You can sit first. That is okay.”
- “I can stay with you for a minute.”
- “You are watching the activity. You can join when you are ready, and I can help.”
- “You picked the art table.”
- “Would you like me nearby, or would you like some space?”

Phrases to reconsider during arrival

- “Say good morning.”
- “Use your words.”
- “Why are you standing there?”
- “Go talk to your friends.”

A greeting can still be warm and welcoming when the reply is a wave, a nod, or no immediate response. Offer a manageable way to join while keeping ordinary opportunities for conversation and supported language learning available.

Why This Routine May Help

A classroom can present many things at once: people, language, materials, movement, and uncertainty about what to do first. The routine narrows that first decision to a familiar sequence: settle, observe, and choose. Its practical aim is to make the next action clearer.

Predictable routines and responsive adult support are established considerations in guidance on transitions. They provide a rationale for trying a consistent arrival point, but they do not establish that this particular routine will reduce stress or increase speech for every student.

Safety, understanding, and expression can influence one another; they do not form a fixed sequence that every multilingual learner follows. A student may speak while uncertain, feel comfortable while remaining quiet, or need explicit teaching as well as a welcoming routine. Let the student’s experience guide the adjustment.

What to Notice

Watch for small actions that help describe how the student enters the activity:

- moving a few inches closer to the group;
- pointing to an activity without speaking;
- watching peers and then joining;
- touching or referring to the picture schedule;
- whispering a word or using a familiar language;
- placing a block in another student's hand.

These actions can be ways of joining or communicating. Record the action and its context without deciding too quickly what it means. Looking toward a group is not the only sign of attention, and eye contact should not be required. The student's own explanation may add something the observation missed.

Troubleshooting

If the student does not want to sit

Offer proximity instead of a direction: "I will sit here. You can look around." Let the student stand, use a different seat, or choose another way to enter. The routine should fit the student's access needs and preferences.

If the student stays without joining

Draw attention to a concrete option: "Blocks are open. I see green and blue." Then offer help with the first action: "Would you like to carry one with me?" Check whether the activity, directions, sensory conditions, or peer situation needs attention. Avoid leaving the student indefinitely on the edge of instruction.

If other students join

When space and supervision allow, welcome them. A shared arrival option can become an ordinary classroom routine. Keep the entrance clear and offer another place if a group makes the original spot less useful for the student.

Try It for One Week

Choose one student and one arrival period. Keep a brief record of what happened, how you responded, and what followed. Include days when nothing changed. The example below is constructed to show how to write a factual note; it is not a reported outcome or an expected five-day progression.

Illustrative week: a constructed example

Day	What happened	How the teacher responded
Mon	Stood near the door.	Offered to sit together; the student sat nearby.
Tue	Looked around the room.	Named two available activities and waited.
Wed	Moved toward the blocks.	Said, “You chose blocks,” and made space to join.
Thu	Whispered “art.”	Said, “You can go there,” and checked access to materials.
Fri	Chose the spot without a prompt, then joined an activity.	Stayed available without adding another direction.

At the end of the week

Ask when joining became easier, harder, or stayed the same. Note what changed in the room, how much prompting was offered, and what the student communicated. A shorter wait or a quieter body may be worth noticing, but neither establishes why a change occurred.

When It May Be Worth Trying

Consider the routine when a student has difficulty finding a way into the classroom or its first activity. This may include a new arrival, a multilingual learner navigating unfamiliar instructions, a student who speaks privately but becomes quiet in groups, a cautious student, or anyone adjusting after a significant transition. Offer it in response to the individual situation, rather than assuming that everyone in a category needs it.

Adapting it for older students

Use an ordinary, age-respectful arrival point: a desk, a quiet place to read the opening task, or a brief check-in with a choice of how to begin. Agree privately on the routine and avoid giving the student a conspicuous special seat. The same principle applies: a clear first step, an available adult, and a way to enter the learning.

Closing

Sometimes a child’s first brave action is not speech. It is sitting near the door, looking around, and choosing where to begin. An older student may open the task, point to a question, or join a partner before saying anything to the class.

You do not need to know everything that quiet moment means in order to respond with care. Make room for the choice, help the student enter the activity, and keep listening. The invitation is simple: “You do not have to perform a greeting to belong here.”

One-Week Arrival Record

Choose one student and one arrival period. Record observable actions, the student’s own communication, the response offered, and what followed. Include days when nothing changed. A shorter wait or more speech is not the required outcome.

At the end of the week, ask: when did joining become easier, harder, or stay the same? What changed in the room? How much adult company or prompting was offered? What should stay, change, or be checked with the student or family?

Practice basis and limits

This author-developed routine draws on the general value of predictable transitions, individual flexibility, and responsive relationships. It has not been evaluated as an intervention and cannot identify a student’s emotional or neurological state. Continue appropriate instruction, assessment, and established supports when concerns persist.

Head Start: Supporting Transitions Both Big and Small supports the general rationale. It does not validate or endorse the Landing Spot Routine.

You don’t have to perform to belong.

Landing Spot Routine: One-Week Arrival Record

Iryna Liusik, MA | Record 1 of 1

Use a learner code and keep completed records private. Use brief entries; for longer notes, use the online record and print it. This practice record is not a scored assessment.

Learner code, grade, observer, and week

Keep completed records private.

Monday: arrival, response, and what followed

Record observable actions, communication, the invitation, and adult support.

Tuesday: arrival, response, and what followed

Record observable actions, communication, the invitation, and adult support.

Wednesday: arrival, response, and what followed

Record observable actions, communication, the invitation, and adult support.

Thursday: arrival, response, and what followed

Record observable actions, communication, the invitation, and adult support.

Friday: arrival, response, and what followed

Record observable actions, communication, the invitation, and adult support.

End-of-week reflection

What became easier, harder, or stayed the same? What will you keep, change, or discuss?

The Visibility Ladder

A participation map and ten-day observation guide

Iryna Liusik, MA
Developing practice guide

At a glance

1. Choose one learner and one recurring classroom context.
2. Record the task, response mode, audience, assistance, and actual contribution separately.
3. Try a relevant invitation, revisit it, and examine what it shows about the learning goal.
4. Use ten days as an observation window, not a timetable for public speech.

Some students walk into class ready to speak. Others enter quietly, scan the room, settle in, and watch before they contribute. A student may point, write, move closer, organize materials, or share an idea privately before choosing to speak in front of a group.

These contributions can go unnoticed when speaking aloud is the main way participation is recognized. Silence can then be described as disengagement, lack of confidence, or poor participation before the teacher has examined what else the student is doing. Quietness deserves attention, but it does not, on its own, explain a student's feelings, knowledge, or reasons for remaining silent.

The Problem With How We Measure Participation

In classrooms where participation is counted mainly through public speech, students who are learning a new language or adjusting to unfamiliar expectations may have fewer ways to show what they can contribute. Language, timing, audience, task knowledge, and relationships can all matter. A student's limited response leaves a question to investigate, rather than a reason to assume either refusal or hidden understanding.

The phrase "visibility budget" offers a practical metaphor for the effort involved in being publicly seen and heard. It is not a measured capacity, a nervous-system threshold, or a score. The metaphor asks a teacher to consider what the moment requires of the learner, including:

- decoding unfamiliar language;
- working out adult expectations;
- navigating peer dynamics;
- predicting routines and rules;

- dealing with the possibility of being wrong in public.

If participation becomes harder, consider whether the task needs clearer teaching, language support, another response route, or a different social setting. The aim is to make an appropriate contribution possible while preserving the thinking the task requires.

How to Use This Tool

Choose one student and one recurring classroom context. Over ten observation days, try the invitations in this guide and record which forms of participation occur, under what conditions, and with what support. About three minutes may be enough to plan an invitation and write a short note; the student's response and follow-up may take longer.

The ten days provide an observation window, not a deadline for public speech. Keep useful options available, repeat a day when appropriate, and listen to the student's preferences. This is a developing practice guide, not a validated scale or diagnostic protocol.

A map of participation invitations

The Visibility Ladder is used here as a participation map. The invitations below can be selected in any order; they are not stages to complete. Some describe an action and others a setting for sharing. Record what the student contributes, the communication mode, the audience, and the assistance separately, so that a thoughtful written argument is not ranked below a brief public answer.

Presence and joining

Being in the room, staying near an activity, or watching what is happening. Presence offers a starting point for contact and invitation. It does not by itself demonstrate attention or understanding.

A signal

A nod, a point, a gesture, a thumbs-up, or an eye movement that appears connected to the exchange. Check the meaning where needed, without requiring eye contact or assuming that agreement means comprehension.

A choice

Selecting between options, pointing to evidence, choosing an object, or indicating an answer through another available mode. A choice can be informative; if the goal involves reasoning, make room to find out how the choice was made.

A contribution to the task

Writing an idea, arranging relevant materials, tracking a discussion, finding evidence, or supporting group work. Give a role connected to the learning, so that quiet participation includes an opportunity to think rather than only a task of helping others.

A private response

Sharing an idea privately with a teacher or partner through speech, a familiar language, signing, or an established communication system. A written private response remains available when it fits the goal. Record both the response mode and the audience rather than treating them as one skill.

A contribution to a group

Sharing with a small group or the whole class through an agreed, accessible communication mode. Record whether the student spoke, showed writing, signed, or used another mode. A public contribution and spoken-language proficiency are different things to examine.

A student may contribute thoughtfully in writing for weeks while choosing limited public speech. Another may speak readily but need further instruction in the content. Look at the contribution itself and the learning goal, rather than expecting an upward path toward public speech.

A Rule for Adjusting Demand

Where practical, change one main demand at a time. Avoid adding unfamiliar language and a larger public audience together when the student is already having difficulty responding. A smaller adjustment can make the next invitation more manageable and help the teacher describe what changed.

Provide any support the student needs, even when several conditions must change together, and record those changes. A workable invitation matters more than a perfectly isolated adjustment.

A Ten-Day Observation Window

Use the ten days to observe, try an appropriate invitation, revisit it, and review what happened. The sequence below organizes the teacher's inquiry. It does not schedule a student's movement toward public speech.

Days 1-2: Establish a reference

Choose a recurring activity and record the task, available ways to respond, audience, assistance, and contribution. Listen to the student's preferences. Keep ordinary teaching and support in place; do not withhold an option just to create a baseline.

Days 3-4: Try a relevant invitation

Choose from the invitations below according to the learning goal and the student's situation. Change one main condition where practical. Record what was offered and what the student did, including no response or a response that leaves the question open.

Days 5-6: Revisit and check the conditions

Offer a comparable opportunity and keep track of changes in content, language, familiarity, assistance, or teaching. A different response may be useful to notice without identifying which change caused it.

Days 7-8: Consider another relevant setting

If it serves the learning goal, observe how participation appears in another setting. This might be independent work, a partner exchange, a private conversation, or a group activity. A larger audience is not inherently a better opportunity.

Days 9-10: Review and choose the next step

Review the notes with the student where appropriate. What contributions were easy to miss? Which conditions seemed workable, and what evidence supports that interpretation? Choose what to keep, teach, change, or investigate. Ten days may reveal a pattern or leave the question unresolved.

Invitations to choose and revisit

Make room for a signal

Offer a meaningful activity while accepting a point, gesture, or other available response. “You can show me.” “You do not have to say it aloud.” Check whether directions, materials, or language support need attention.

Offer a choice

Provide two relevant options or invite pointing to evidence. “Point to your answer.” If a choice would not show the required reasoning, make room for a further explanation through a suitable mode.

Give a meaningful role

Offer a role such as note-taker, discussion tracker, evidence finder, or technology support when it contributes to the learning. “Your role today is to track the strongest evidence.” Ensure the role offers thinking, rather than only a way to keep busy.

Invite a private response

“Tell me privately first,” or “Would you like to write it and talk it through?” Agree on a mode that fits the task. Keep ordinary opportunities for supported speaking available when speaking is the learning goal.

Offer a peer bridge

Invite the student to share with one peer, then agree on what the peer or pair may share outward. Keep any partner contribution visible, and check the student’s own understanding when the task calls for independent evidence.

Offer a small audience

Invite a contribution to two or three students if that setting is useful. Keep a private option available and ask what would make the exchange workable, rather than assuming a small group feels easier.

Agree on a brief public contribution

If welcome and relevant, invite the student to point to evidence, show writing, select an answer, or share a short phrase. Agree on the invitation beforehand. Public participation is an option, not a reward for completing earlier forms.

Extend a contribution when it serves the goal

A fuller contribution might be a longer written explanation, a more precise gesture with materials, or a spoken sentence. Extend what the task requires, in a workable setting. If participation becomes harder, revisit the invitation, check what changed, and provide teaching or support.

Six Ways to Participate Beyond Whole-Class Speech

1. Gesture

Pointing, nodding, or showing a number with fingers can communicate a response. “I see your response.” Check what the gesture refers to, and invite further evidence if the task requires an explanation.

2. Looking and tracking

A student may look between speakers, text, or materials. Describe only what you can observe: “I noticed you looking between the diagram and your notes.” Looking away alone does not establish inattention, and looking toward the speaker does not establish understanding.

3. Proximity

Moving closer to peers or an activity may be a way of joining. “I noticed you moved closer to the group.” Offer an accessible next action without assuming that proximity reveals how the student feels.

4. Object or response choice

Selecting a text, tool, material, or response option can be a meaningful decision. “I noticed the choice you made there.” Examine the choice in relation to the task, and ask for reasoning through an appropriate mode when needed.

5. Whisper or home language

A quiet response or a response in a familiar language is speech, even when it is not the speech the whole class hears. “Both languages are welcome.” Use language support you can interpret reliably, and do not confuse English fluency with knowledge of the content.

6. Movement and shared work

Organizing materials, helping a peer, building a model, or taking a structured role can contribute to the group. “That was a real contribution to the group.” Distinguish practical help from evidence of the particular concept or reasoning being taught.

These actions deserve recognition as possible participation. Their value does not depend on becoming public speech later. What they demonstrate about a learning goal still needs to be examined.

Why This Matters

Recognizing more than public speech can help a teacher offer a wider range of invitations and notice contributions that would otherwise be missed. The intended aims are to respect identity, support engagement, examine evidence more carefully, avoid premature conclusions, make room for confidence to develop, and provide useful language support.

Those aims are not established effects of this ten-day guide. It has not been shown to improve assessment accuracy or reduce referrals. Necessary teaching, assessment, and specialist support should continue; students do not need to complete the ladder before receiving them.

Closing

Sometimes a student moves closer to a discussion before speaking. Sometimes they contribute in writing before answering aloud, or offer one quiet sentence that a teacher might easily miss. Honor the contribution, look carefully at what it shows, and leave room for another attempt.

When quiet communication receives a thoughtful response, the invitation becomes clear: “There is room for my voice here.”

A sample daily entry

Constructed example.

Task / goal: Explain a character’s change of plan. **Setting / audience:** Independent writing followed by whole-class discussion. **Language / mode:** English writing; no spoken response recorded. **Assistance:** Prompt read aloud to the class; no content prompts. **Contribution:** Linked two relevant details to a plausible reason. The writing supports this inference; oral explanation remains unassessed.

A Brief Daily Record

A brief note is enough to begin noticing patterns. Record one defined classroom moment each day: the task and setting, the response mode, the audience, any assistance, and the actual contribution. The record contains no rung numbers or participation score.

Describe the response conditions in words where they matter: unfamiliar vocabulary, preparation time, a private exchange, or a whole-class invitation. “Not observed” means no usable observation was recorded. It is different from observing a student stay near an activity without producing a response. Include quiet days, unchanged patterns, and difficult moments.

Useful details to retain

- Student initiated: the contribution began without an immediate invitation to respond. Note prior preparation or prompting if relevant.
- Needed support: record what support was offered and accepted, without treating support as a lower level of participation.
- Rejoined after a pause: describe a return to the activity using the student's actions and words.

Reading the record after ten days

Look for differences across tasks, audiences, languages, and support conditions. Patterns may become clearer, but ten days may also leave the question unresolved. More public speech is not automatically better evidence, and a changed response does not show which condition caused it.

When speaking is part of the learning goal

Keep appropriate oral-language instruction and supported practice in the plan. Another response route may reveal content knowledge without demonstrating spoken-language proficiency. Likewise, when a student uses an established communication system, assess the intended learning through an accessible mode and the relevant criteria.

Reflection after Day 10

Which conditions appeared to make participation more workable, and what supports that interpretation?

Where did participation appear quietly, and what did it demonstrate about the task?

Which participation route did the student prefer? What remains uncertain?

What will you teach, check, or offer next?

Practice basis and limits

CAST's UDL Guidelines support options for expression and learner variability. WIDA's newcomer guidance emphasizes access to language and content learning. These principles inform this observation guide; neither source validates the guide or establishes a ten-day developmental sequence.

CAST. Universal Design for Learning Guidelines: Action & Expression. <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression/>

WIDA. Five strategies to welcome newcomers into your classroom.
<https://wida.wisc.edu/news/five-strategies-welcome-newcomers-your-classroom>

Ten-Day Participation Record

The record below gives each observation room for the task, communication mode, audience, assistance, and actual contribution. Complete it here, or use the two-page fillable PDF, which can also be printed for handwritten notes.

Visibility Ladder: Ten-Day Participation Record

Iryna Liusik, MA | Record 1 of 2

Use a learner code and keep completed records private. Use brief entries; for longer notes, use the online record and print it. This practice record is not a scored assessment. Record distinct details; there is no rung score or deadline for speech.

Learner code, grade or subject, observer, and start date

Use one defined classroom moment per observation.

Day 1: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 2: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 3: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 4: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 5: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Midpoint note

What is worth checking next? Keep useful options available.

Visibility Ladder: Ten-Day Participation Record

Iryna Liusik, MA | Record 2 of 2

Use a learner code and keep completed records private. Use brief entries; for longer notes, use the online record and print it. This practice record is not a scored assessment. Record distinct details; there is no rung score or deadline for speech.

Learner code and observation period

Use the same code as on page 1.

Day 6: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 7: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 8: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 9: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Day 10: task, conditions, participation, and assistance

Task / goal; setting / audience; language / mode; assistance; actual contribution. Mark a missing observation.

Reflection and next step

What did participation show about the task? What remains uncertain? What will you teach, check, or offer next?

Evidence Before Judgment

A practical protocol with extended implementation guidance

Iryna Liusik, MA

Developing classroom protocol · Expanded guidance

At a glance

1. **TARGET:** specify the learning goal and the decision at stake.
2. **CONDITIONS:** retain the language, audience, response mode, time, and assistance.
3. **TRACE:** examine what the learner actually did or produced.
4. **CONTRAST:** use existing work first; offer another opportunity only for an unresolved question.
5. **JUDGMENT:** retain, revise, or defer the conclusion; consult when needed.

For a brief decision during instruction, start with The 60-Second Evidence Pause. This full protocol adds documentation, decision options, and team review.

Before a Classroom Response Becomes a Judgment

Schools routinely have procedures for what happens after a concern becomes part of educational decision-making. Teachers reteach, monitor progress, adjust support, change grouping, communicate with families, initiate intervention, and seek evaluation when needed. Yet an earlier step often remains less visible: the moment when one classroom performance first becomes evidence about what a learner understands.

That moment may be very small. A learner remains silent when called on, gives an incomplete explanation, struggles unexpectedly, or performs differently from what earlier work suggested. The lesson continues, as it must, but the performance may already be shaping the level of work offered next, the support provided, the judgment entered into a record, or what educators begin to believe about the learner's readiness, understanding, or potential.

The performance may accurately reveal a conceptual need. It may also reflect the conditions under which the learner was asked to demonstrate understanding, including time, language, audience, response mode, rehearsal, prompt structure, familiarity, or environmental load. A record can move from "This is what the learner did under these conditions" to "This is what the learner understands or is capable of doing" before the evidence supports that broader claim.

Evidence Before Judgment proposes a checkpoint when a limited or unexpected performance may support a consequential conclusion. The educator identifies the learning target, examines available work and its conditions, and offers a further opportunity only when a question remains. The review

is intended to inform whether to retain, revise, or defer the conclusion and whether consultation is needed. The guidance below explains this proposed practice; its effects on documentation, decisions, and learners have not been established.

Its governing principle is:

Preserve the target. Describe the conditions. Examine the evidence. Carry forward only what it supports.

What the Protocol Adds

A student should not have to demonstrate the same learning again because an available response was overlooked.

Educators already use wait time, written responses, visual models, manipulatives, partner rehearsal, home-language support, and other pathways through which learners may demonstrate understanding. Evidence Before Judgment does not claim that these practices are new.

The proposed contribution is to organize these familiar practices around the account that will be carried forward: what the learner demonstrated, with what assistance, and how far the resulting conclusion can reasonably reach.

The educator first asks whether existing work can resolve the question. An overlooked response needs examination, an incomplete note may need its missing context restored, and an overly broad conclusion needs qualification. Where further evidence is needed, a planned comparison can preserve the learning target while adjusting a nonessential condition. Its purpose is to examine the emerging judgment, not simply to increase participation.

Practical support and interpretation raise linked questions:

What accommodation might help this learner participate?

Alongside that question:

What exactly am I trying to know, and does this performance provide a sufficiently representative basis for that conclusion?

The next action should follow from what remains unresolved about the learning goal. If a student has already written a relevant explanation, read it before requesting another performance. If the work shows a misconception, teach that part. When the available response cannot answer the question, offer a suitable opportunity and keep track of any help or new instruction. In each case, the account carried forward should explain what the evidence supports and what action follows.

Choosing an appropriate response requires examining the actual work and the decision at stake, rather than treating every unanswered question as a need for another response format.

Evidence Before Judgment is intended to help educators examine where an account may be incomplete or overextended before it becomes a broad conclusion about the learner.

What Evidence Before Judgment Is

Evidence Before Judgment is:

- a proposed checkpoint before a consequential classroom judgment
- a classroom decision protocol
- a structure for comparing available evidence and relevant further responses
- a way to separate the intellectual target from surrounding performance demands
- a proposed procedure for examining the basis and limits of educational conclusions
- a bridge between classroom observation and consequential judgment.

It operates between what the educator observes and what the educator concludes.

The protocol does not replace professional judgment. It is intended to make the basis for professional judgment easier to examine.

What Evidence Before Judgment Is Not

Evidence Before Judgment is not:

- a diagnostic instrument
- a behavioral rating scale
- a participation ladder
- a measure of anxiety, confidence, belonging, motivation, or regulation
- a method for proving hidden competence
- a guarantee that changing conditions will produce stronger performance
- a requirement that every learner receive every possible response option
- an alternative to instruction, intervention, formal assessment, special education evaluation, or multilingual learner procedures
- a reason to postpone necessary support while collecting evidence indefinitely.

The protocol may confirm the original concern, reveal that the concern was too broad, leave the evidence unresolved, or indicate that consultation is needed. All four outcomes are professionally useful.

When to Use It

The full protocol is not intended for every error, pause, or unanswered question. Most classroom mistakes can be addressed through ordinary instruction.

Use Evidence Before Judgment when a performance may begin carrying more weight than the immediate moment, particularly when one or more of the following circumstances is present.

A consequential decision may follow

The performance may influence:

- the level of work offered next
- grading or progress reporting
- grouping or placement
- intervention or referral
- enrichment or access to challenge
- family communication
- expectations for future participation
- judgments about readiness, ability, independence, or need.

The performance conflicts with other evidence

The learner may:

- remain silent publicly but reason accurately in writing
- struggle under immediate response but succeed after preparation
- perform differently in a familiar and unfamiliar format
- demonstrate understanding with materials but not through symbolic notation
- produce different evidence across languages, settings, or audiences.

The performance appears condition-sensitive

The learner's evidence changes noticeably across:

- immediate and prepared responses
- public and private settings
- oral and written pathways
- English and another language
- independent and rehearsed performance
- familiar and unfamiliar task formats.

The same uncertainty has appeared repeatedly

The concern has emerged more than once, but the available evidence does not yet distinguish limited understanding from difficulty demonstrating that understanding under the current conditions.

Match the Evidence to the Consequence

Not every educational decision requires the same amount of evidence.

A low-stakes instructional adjustment may reasonably follow one relevant observation; another comparison is not always needed. A broad or enduring conclusion affecting intervention, placement, referral, enrichment, grading, academic opportunity, or perceived ability calls for a stronger evidentiary basis and any applicable formal procedures.

The greater the consequence of the judgment, the stronger and more representative its evidentiary basis should be.

One classroom event may justify another question, a temporary scaffold, or a brief instructional adjustment. It should not, by itself, define a learner's ability, motivation, readiness, language capacity, or potential.

The 60-Second Classroom Check

When there is no time to complete a written record, ask:

Target

What understanding, reasoning, knowledge, or skill am I actually trying to evaluate?

Conditions

What else did the learner have to manage in order to demonstrate it?

Trace

What exactly did I observe, without labels or inferred internal states?

Contrast

Does existing work resolve the question? If not, what relevant further opportunity could preserve the same learning target?

Judgment

Does the available evidence justify retaining, revising, or deferring the conclusion? Is consultation also needed?

Choose the next step

If existing work answers the question: examine it against the learning goal, retain the assistance involved, and correct or qualify the record. Another performance is unnecessary.

If a relevant question remains: offer an appropriate next opportunity, record the conditions and help, and state what the response does and does not establish. Continue teaching, support, and worthwhile challenge while uncertainty remains.

Use the full record for decisions that need documentation. An ordinary instructional adjustment may need only a brief note.

The Full Protocol

The examples below illustrate the protocol. They are not reports of implementation results.

1. TARGET

Define the understanding being judged

Begin by identifying exactly what the learner was expected to know, understand, reason through, or do.

Avoid targets that are so broad that they cannot be evaluated clearly.

Instead of:

Understands the lesson.

Write:

The learner can compare the magnitude of two fractions and justify the comparison.

Instead of:

Has good reading comprehension.

Write:

The learner can infer a character's motivation from relevant textual evidence.

Instead of:

Understands the science concept.

Write:

The learner can explain the relationship between evaporation and condensation.

A classroom task often combines the intended intellectual target with additional performance demands. A mathematics explanation may require immediate speech, rapid English retrieval, public attention, and an unfamiliar response format. A reading task may require extensive writing even when the intended target is inferential reasoning.

Some of these demands may be integral to the target. Others may be incidental.

Complete:

The understanding or skill I am trying to evaluate is:

Then ask:

Which demands surrounding the response are part of the target, and which are merely conditions under which the learner was asked to demonstrate it?

If spontaneous public English speaking is the target, speech, English production, immediacy, and audience cannot simply be removed without changing the claim. If conceptual understanding of fractions is the target, immediate whole-group speech may not be essential.

Before changing a response condition, identify which demands are essential to the target and which are incidental. If spoken explanation is itself the target, retain that distinction: another mode may show conceptual understanding while leaving oral expression to be taught and assessed.

2. CONDITIONS

Identify how the evidence was produced

Educational evidence does not emerge under neutral conditions. Before deciding what the learner's performance means, identify the circumstances under which it was produced.

Record only the conditions relevant to the event.

Condition	Questions to consider
Language	Was the response English-only, multilingual, interpreted, or supported with vocabulary? Was English production part of the target?
Time	Was the response immediate, timed, prepared, delayed, repeated, or revisited later?
Exposure	Was the learner responding before the whole group, in a small group, with a partner, privately, or independently?
Response mode	Was the response oral, written, selected, gestural, visual, material, technological, or mixed?
Rehearsal	Was there no preparation, private planning, written preparation, partner rehearsal, modeling, or a repeated attempt?
Prompt structure	Was the prompt familiar, linguistically dense, multilayered, visually supported, open-ended, or constrained?
Environmental load	Was the routine familiar or unfamiliar, quiet or distracting, predictable or unexpected, socially exposed or relatively private?
Assistance	What prompting, modeling, translation, communication support, new teaching, or peer help was provided? Did it make the task accessible, supply reasoning, or do both?

These conditions are not explanations of the learner. They are features of the evidentiary situation.

Do not write:

The learner was too anxious to answer.

Record:

The learner was asked to respond immediately in English before the whole group after an unfamiliar transition.

Do not write:

She lacks confidence.

Record:

She selected the relevant evidence in writing and did not provide an oral response when called on publicly.

The conditions may or may not explain the performance. At this stage, their purpose is only to preserve the circumstances under which the evidence was produced.

Complete:

The original conditions were:

3. TRACE

Record what actually became observable

A trace is what the learner said, wrote, selected, constructed, pointed toward, revised, attempted, or left incomplete. It is not yet an explanation of the learner.

A defensible trace is observable, specific, contextualized, and separate from the judgment that may later follow.

Instead of:

He refused to participate.

Write:

During partner work, he wrote one complete response. When asked to share it with the class, he looked at the page, remained silent, and passed.

Instead of:

She does not understand fractions.

Write:

She selected the larger fraction correctly with visual models but did not provide an oral justification during immediate whole-group questioning.

Instead of:

The learner cannot explain the concept in English.

Write:

During partner work, the learner explained two causes in the home language and pointed to the corresponding images. No English explanation was produced during the whole-group discussion.

The protocol does not permit conclusions about anxiety, safety, motivation, trauma, confidence, understanding, or refusal from posture, gaze, silence, proximity, movement, or isolated behavior alone. Such observations may identify a pattern worth examining, but they cannot establish its cause.

Complete:

What another educator could have observed was:

4. CONTRAST

Examine existing evidence; request another response only if needed

The contrast addresses a remaining evidence question. It does not require the student to repeat work that already demonstrates the intended learning.

First examine relevant existing work. If a further response is needed, choose a condition not essential to the target and change as little else as practical.

Possible changes include:

Time

Allow silent thinking, brief preparation, or an opportunity to return to the question when response speed is not part of the target.

Exposure

Move from whole-group response to a small group, partner, or private response when public speaking is not being evaluated.

Response mode

Permit writing, drawing, selecting evidence, using manipulatives, constructing a model, recording a response, or demonstrating when that mode can validly reveal the original target.

Rehearsal

Allow private planning, written preparation, or partner rehearsal before another individual response.

Language

Permit processing or explanation in a stronger language when English production is not the target and the response can be interpreted responsibly.

Prompt structure

Clarify or restate the task when linguistic density or multiple directions may have obscured the intended reasoning, without supplying the answer or reducing the intellectual demand.

Before the learner responds again, complete:

The learning target remains:

The principal condition changing is:

This condition is not essential to the target because:

The evidence I will examine is:

Accuracy / depth / completeness / independence / transfer / other: _____

The comparable opportunity will be:

Whenever possible, change only one principal condition. Moving from immediate whole-group speech to written partner work changes time, exposure, response mode, and rehearsal simultaneously. The result may still be informative, but it cannot show which condition mattered.

The comparison is not construct-preserving if the second opportunity changes:

- the concept being evaluated
- the expected depth of reasoning
- the correctness criterion
- the central disciplinary practice
- an essential language skill when language is the target
- an essential performance skill when that performance is the target.

Before proceeding, ask:

If the learner succeeds under the changed condition, will that success still demonstrate the understanding I intended to evaluate?

If the answer is no, the change has altered the target rather than clarified the evidence.

Do not continue changing conditions until the learner produces the result you hoped to see. Examine the evidence relevant to the unresolved question, including responses that confirm a difficulty. A comparison can inform the judgment without proving what caused a difference.

5. JUDGMENT

Compare the evidence before concluding

Examine the relevant existing work and any further response in relation to the target. Record assistance and changes in the opportunity.

Changes in speech or visible participation may matter to the learner and the classroom. They do not, on their own, settle what the response shows about the learning goal. The question for this decision is:

What does the available evidence support about this learning target, and does the proposed conclusion need to be retained, narrowed, revised, or left unresolved?

Choose whether to retain, revise, or defer the conclusion. Consultation can accompany any of those decisions.

RETAIN

Retain a concern when the available, relevant evidence supports it at the scope being claimed. A specific misconception in existing work may already justify teaching; a broader claim requires a broader basis. Comparisons across appropriate conditions can contribute when needed, but are not a prerequisite for every instructional response.

The relevant evidence continues to support the specific concern.

Example:

The learner demonstrated the same misconception during immediate oral explanation, written explanation after preparation, and work with visual models. The current evidence supports further instruction in the underlying concept.

Retaining a concern does not require converting it into a permanent learner characteristic. The conclusion should remain tied to the target and the available evidence.

REVISE

Revise a judgment when overlooked work, recovered information about assistance, or a relevant further response changes what the evidence supports. A correction may require reading work that already exists rather than asking the learner to demonstrate the same understanding again.

The available evidence may require narrowing the original judgment. A changed response does not establish why the earlier response differed.

Instead of:

The learner does not understand inference.

Write:

The learner demonstrated inferential reasoning accurately in writing after preparation but did not demonstrate the same reasoning during immediate whole-group oral response.

The contrast does not prove global mastery. It establishes that the first performance cannot, by itself, support a broad conclusion about the learner's understanding.

DEFER

Defer a broad conclusion when the evidence remains limited, inconsistent, or ambiguous, or when the comparison changed too many conditions to support a stable interpretation.

Uncertainty should remain uncertainty rather than becoming a learner characteristic.

Example:

The learner participated more during partner discussion, but the available responses did not yet provide sufficient evidence of the intended reasoning. One additional comparable sample is needed.

Deferral is not indecision. It is an accurate statement about what the evidence currently permits.

CONSULT

Seek the relevant colleague, family perspective, or established specialist process when the concern calls for expertise or evidence beyond this classroom check. Consultation can accompany retain, revise, or defer and does not require completing a fixed number of comparisons first.

Consult when concerns persist across representative conditions, settings, languages, or response modes, or when the evidence points beyond ordinary instructional adjustment.

Consultation may include:

- the learner and family
- previous teachers or existing records
- multilingual or ESL specialists
- intervention teams
- special education professionals
- speech-language professionals
- school psychologists
- instructional coaches or other relevant specialists.

Example:

The difficulty remained visible across comparable oral, written, and visual opportunities. Consultation is warranted to determine the appropriate instructional or evaluative response.

Consultation is not a failure of the protocol. It is one of its intended outcomes. It can occur alongside retaining, revising, or deferring a conclusion; the protocol is not a prerequisite for needed support.

Match the Next Action to the Evidence

The statement “the evidence was insufficient” leaves the teacher with a decision still to make. The cases below connect that decision to the work already available and the question that remains.

Each case calls for a different practical response while preserving the intended learning goal.

Classroom situation	What to examine	Next action
A student is quiet in discussion but has written an explanation.	Read the explanation against the task criterion and identify any help that contributed to it.	Use the available work to inform the judgment and next task. Do not require another performance to correct a note that overlooked it.
No available response addresses the learning goal.	Check whether the task and directions were accessible and what evidence is still needed.	Provide needed teaching or a suitable further opportunity, preserving the target and recording what changes.
An answer follows a model or a peer's explanation.	Distinguish the student's contribution from reasoning supplied through the help.	Use the response to plan teaching. If independent reasoning remains relevant and unresolved, offer a suitable opportunity to examine it.
The work shows a specific misconception.	Identify the reasoning that led to the error and whether the concern is limited to this task or supported more broadly.	Teach the point of difficulty and offer relevant practice, while keeping the conclusion tied to the evidence.

These are practical examples, not a requirement to collect another response in every case. Use what the work already establishes to decide what needs attention next.

When a note overstates the available evidence, correct its scope even if another response is not yet available. “Did not answer aloud in today’s discussion” can remain a faithful observation without becoming “does not understand.” Where the work does reveal a difficulty, keep that evidence in the account and use it to plan instruction. The same care is needed for a correct answer produced with substantial help: acknowledge the contribution while keeping the help visible.

The purpose is to choose a defensible next action: examine available work, teach what is missing, offer a relevant opportunity, or correct the account that will guide a later decision.

How Much Evidence Does This Decision Require?

The more consequential the judgment, the greater the need to know whether its evidentiary basis remains defensible across representative conditions.

Evidence stability does not mean that performance must be identical across every condition. Human performance naturally varies. It means that a broad conclusion about understanding should not depend entirely on one avoidably narrow response condition unless that condition is itself part of the capacity being judged.

When evidence changes materially after a nonessential condition changes, the defensible conclusion is not automatically:

The learner understands.

The defensible conclusion is:

The original performance cannot, by itself, support a global judgment about understanding. The later response provides evidence under its recorded conditions; it does not establish why the earlier response differed.

The aim is to replace premature certainty with a precise statement of what the evidence can and cannot establish, without substituting a reassuring conclusion for an unsupported concern.

Keep assistance and learning in the account

A classroom comparison can inform a judgment without identifying a cause. Using the same question does not guarantee equivalent demand. Writing may allow revision, extra time may include rehearsal, and a partner or adult may supply part of the reasoning.

Record any modeling, new instruction, prompting, translation, communication support, or peer contribution, and describe what the help provided. Access to the question and provision of the answer are different: reading a prompt aloud does not necessarily supply the reasoning, whereas modeling an explanation may supply part of it. A successful response after teaching can show supported performance or subsequent learning without establishing that the earlier understanding was already present but hidden. When speaking itself is the target, another mode can show something useful without demonstrating spoken-language proficiency.

Worked example: from a response to a record

Constructed illustration. The passage, student response, and records below were created to explain the checkpoint. They are not classroom data or findings.

The task and criterion

The learning goal is to infer a character's reason for a decision and explain the inference using two relevant details. Oral fluency is not part of this task's criterion.

Mara planned to leave the seedlings on the classroom windowsill for the weekend. At noon, she touched the soil and pulled back her finger. The leaves that had stood upright that morning were folding inward. She looked at the bright window, then carried the tray to a table farther inside the room. Before leaving, she filled a cup at the sink.

Prompt: Why does Mara move the seedlings? Use two details from the passage to explain your answer.

A response meets the criterion when it offers a plausible text-based reason, identifies two relevant details, and explains how they support that reason. Merely naming the new location would not meet it.

The available response and assistance

The student writes: “She thinks the window is too hot for the plants. She pulls her finger away from the soil, and the leaves are folding in. Those details suggest the plants are getting too hot or dry, so she moves them away from the strong sun.”

The class had five minutes to reread and write. The teacher read the prompt aloud once to everyone. This response was written independently, without a model answer, sentence opening, content prompt, translation, or peer contribution. During the later whole-class discussion, the student did not answer aloud.

The first note and the revised account

First note: “Did not answer the inference question; cannot explain the character’s decision.”

Revised account: “In the Mara inference task, the student independently wrote that heat or dryness prompted the move, connected that inference to the withdrawal of Mara’s finger and the folding leaves, and explained why moving away from the window would help. The class had five minutes to reread and write, and the prompt was read aloud once. No spoken response was offered in the subsequent whole-class discussion. The written response meets this task’s inference criterion; oral explanation and the reason for the silence remain unassessed.”

Next action: Continue text-based inference work at an appropriate level of challenge. Offer a choice of written preparation or private rehearsal for the next discussion, while teaching oral explanation when that is a separate learning goal.

What the next reader can recover

The first note allows a missing spoken response to stand for missing understanding. The revised account gives a later reader the target, the actual reasoning, the opportunity and assistance, and the limits of the conclusion. It supports an instructional choice without establishing the student’s competence across all texts or explaining the silence.

If the response were insufficient

If the available writing said only “She moved them to the table,” it would identify the action without explaining the reason or citing two details. The record should preserve that limitation. The teacher could teach how to connect a detail to an inference and offer another suitable task, keeping any modeling or prompting in the account. A kind interpretation must remain open to a genuine instructional need.

The Sentence That Travels

Include the date and task so a later reader knows which occasion the account concerns. Ask whether removing a detail would change what that reader thinks the learner demonstrated. Retain assistance, relevant conflicting evidence, and uncertainty where they affect interpretation.

The most consequential part of the protocol is often not the changed condition itself. It is the sentence that enters future conversations, records, grading decisions, intervention meetings, referrals, and expectations.

A conclusion may follow the learner long after the classroom moment from which it arose has been forgotten. Documentation should therefore preserve both the evidence and the conditions under which it was produced.

Avoid:

She cannot explain her reasoning.

Prefer:

She explained her reasoning accurately after written preparation but has not yet demonstrated the same reasoning through immediate whole-group speech.

Avoid:

He understands but is too anxious to speak.

Prefer:

His independent written response identified relevant evidence for this task. He also contributed during partner discussion. No whole-group oral explanation was recorded, so that aspect of performance remains unassessed; the reason for his silence is not established.

Avoid:

The student is simply learning English.

Prefer:

The learner demonstrated the concept accurately through a visual model and home-language explanation. Additional evidence is needed to determine current English-language production and whether the concern appears across languages.

Avoid:

She is not ready for more challenging work.

Prefer:

The learner's responses differed across two opportunities on this task. The record does not yet justify a broad judgment about readiness. Continue worthwhile, appropriately supported challenge, address the difficulty observed, and use a relevant next task to clarify the remaining question.

The goal is not to produce a kinder conclusion.

The goal is to produce a conclusion no broader, more certain, or more consequential than the evidence can support.

Evidence Comparison Record

Use the complete record below to preserve the available work, any remaining question, a further opportunity if needed, the assistance involved, and the next action. A further student response is not required when the existing evidence resolves the question. Completion time depends on the decision.

Implementation Review

Use these questions to review implementation. Apply the comparison items only when a further response was needed. This is a practice checklist, not a validated fidelity measure or a guarantee that the resulting judgment is sound.

The educational decision or consequence was identified.

The learning target was defined precisely.

Essential demands were distinguished from incidental demands; an oral-language target was retained when relevant.

The original performance was described without labels or inferred internal states.

The conditions under which the evidence was produced were made visible.

One credible alternative explanation was considered.

Existing relevant work was examined before requesting another response; any further opportunity addressed a remaining question.

If a further response was needed, the intended adjustment and all additional assistance or teaching were recorded.

If responses were compared, the target and criterion remained appropriate, and any difference in demand was acknowledged.

The criterion was specified before interpreting a further response; existing work was also examined against the learning target.

The comparison focused on evidence of the target rather than participation or comfort alone.

The final conclusion was limited to what the available evidence supported.

The protocol was not used to diagnose, presume hidden competence, or postpone necessary support.

Without shared implementation expectations, educators may use the same name for substantially different practices. The checklist makes these implementation choices available for review. Completing it does not, by itself, establish that a judgment is valid.

Non-Negotiable Safeguards

1. Do not infer an internal state from one observable behavior

Silence does not prove anxiety, understanding, refusal, trauma, confusion, or disengagement.

2. Do not treat public speech as the highest form of evidence by default

The evidentiary value of a response depends on the claim being evaluated.

3. Do not lower the intellectual target and describe the result as evidence of the original target

Instructional scaffolding and evidentiary comparison are related but not identical.

4. Do not treat one successful contrast as proof of global competence

It establishes only what that response demonstrates under its recorded conditions; it does not isolate a cause.

5. Do not treat greater participation as demonstrated mastery

More speech, visible engagement, or apparent comfort does not necessarily provide stronger evidence of the target.

6. Do not continue changing conditions until a preferred result appears

The protocol is a disciplined comparison, not a search for confirmation.

7. Do not delay necessary support while pursuing endless evidence

Persistent concerns across representative conditions warrant consultation and established school procedures.

8. Do not use the protocol to diagnose

It supports educational judgment but does not determine clinical, linguistic, developmental, or disability status.

9. Do not use conditions unavailable during the consequential decision without documenting that difference

The conditions under which evidence is gathered must remain relevant to the judgment being considered.

10. Do not convert one event into a permanent learner characteristic

A single episode may justify another question, a temporary support, or a bounded instructional decision. Broader and more enduring conclusions require stronger evidence.

Three proposed levels of use

Classroom pause

For an immediate instructional question, hold the target in mind and examine the available response and its conditions. Offer a further opportunity only when it addresses a remaining question.

Documented comparison

When uncertainty repeats or a decision will travel into a record, use the Evidence Comparison Record. Preserve the target, relevant conditions, observable response, assistance, judgment, and next action. Record a planned change only when a further response is needed.

Team review

Use the same questions in an existing planning, multilingual-learner, intervention, or student-support discussion. These are proposed uses, not a district-adopted standard or a tested implementation model.

Use in School Teams

Bring the particular claim, relevant work, and conditions needed to interpret it. Agree on the next instruction, opportunity, or consultation, who will take it forward, and when to return to the question. Consultation can proceed alongside classroom review; completing this record is not a condition for receiving support.

Evidence Before Judgment may be used mentally by an individual teacher for a low-stakes instructional decision, documented briefly when a pattern repeats, or applied more formally in professional learning community (PLC) meetings, intervention or multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) reviews, and grading, referral, or student-support discussions.

Before a team carries a conclusion forward, ask:

What precisely is the claim about the learner?

What observable traces currently support it?

Under what conditions were those traces produced?

Which traces were treated as relevant, and what weight did they receive?

Is the conclusion resting too heavily on one condition?

Has existing relevant work been examined? Would a further opportunity address a remaining question?

Does the available evidence justify retaining, revising, or deferring the conclusion? Is consultation also needed?

What information about conditions and uncertainty must remain visible in the record?

The purpose is not to add a new form to every meeting. It is to establish a shared professional checkpoint before a conditional performance becomes a durable conclusion.

The Central Professional Question

Evidence Before Judgment replaces:

What is wrong with this learner's performance?

with:

What does this performance allow us to conclude, given the conditions under which it was produced?

Schools already have systems for acting on evidence. Evidence Before Judgment proposes a review of the account entering those systems: what supports it, what remains uncertain, and what the next reader needs in order to use it responsibly.

Every important educational decision deserves evidence at least as strong as the conclusion it creates.

Feedback on use

Describe the grade or subject, the judgment you were considering, and the evidence you reviewed. If a further response was needed, explain what changed and whether the target remained intact. Did the guide clarify a next action? How long did it take? Which instruction was useful, unclear, unrealistic, or difficult to apply? An unchanged judgment or limited usefulness is worth reporting. Please omit names and identifying learner details.

Developmental Use Notice

Evidence Before Judgment is a developing classroom protocol for examining the basis of an educational judgment before it is carried into a record or later decision. It is offered for professional use, critical review, and further inquiry. It is not standardized, validated, diagnostic, or established as effective in improving educational outcomes.

The protocol supplements rather than replaces formal assessment, legally required accommodations, intervention procedures, multilingual learner processes, special education evaluation, Child Find responsibilities, and professional diagnostic judgment.

Research basis

The accompanying Evidence Before Judgment working paper develops the argument for the checkpoint, discusses selected scholarship and close precedents, and sets out constructed examples, limits, and questions for evaluation.

Evidence Before Judgment: Comparison Record

Iryna Liusik, MA | Record 1 of 2

Use a learner code and keep completed records private. Use brief entries; for longer notes, use the online record and print it. This practice record is not a scored assessment. Review existing work first. A further response is optional.

Learner code, grade or subject, and date

Use a code rather than a name.

Decision at stake

What might this observation influence?

Learning target and evidence criterion

What would demonstrate the intended reasoning, depth, or independence?

Original task and conditions

Record language, time, audience, response mode, and assistance.

Observable trace

What did the student say, write, select, construct, or leave incomplete?

Provisional judgment

What conclusion are you beginning to make?

Alternative explanation and distinguishing evidence

What else might fit the observation? What would help you examine it?

Existing evidence and remaining question

What relevant work is already available? Is another response needed?

Evidence Before Judgment: Comparison Record

Iryna Liusik, MA | Record 2 of 2

Use a learner code and keep completed records private. Use brief entries; for longer notes, use the online record and print it. This practice record is not a scored assessment. Review existing work first. A further response is optional.

Evidence examined or further opportunity, if needed

Describe the existing work reviewed, or any planned adjustment. Preserve the target.

What changed, if anything

Include changes in task, time, audience, mode, and assistance beyond the original plan.

Result and assistance

What did the student demonstrate? Include teaching, rehearsal, prompting, translation, or peer help.

Judgment: retain, revise, or defer

Is consultation also needed, and why?

The evidence currently supports

Keep the conclusion specific to the target and recorded conditions.

The evidence does not yet support

What remains unestablished?

Next action and review

What will you teach, check, offer, or discuss next, and when?