What to do… Cold call

What is Cold Call?

Cold Call is calling on students at any time to check their level of understanding.

What is the purpose of Cold Call?

1. **It checks understanding:**

Cold Call allows you to check on exactly the student you want to in order to assess mastery. As you collect data on your students’ output, you will paint a picture of their progress. After having done this, you will, naturally, want to check certain students’ understanding over others. Cold Call gets rid of the need to manage ‘hands up’ and allows you to pinpoint who you are questioning systematically and effectively.

1. **It increases pace:**

With Cold Call, you no longer have a delay after you ask, “Can anyone tell me what one cause of the World War I was?” You no longer have to scan the room and wait for hands. Instead of saying, “I’m seeing the same four hands. I want to hear from more of you. Doesn’t anyone else know this?” you simply say, “Tell us one cause of World War I, please, [slight pause here] Darren.”

1. **It increases student accountability:**

Cold Call signals to students not only that they are likely to be called on to participate, and therefore that they should engage in the work of the classroom, but that you want to know what they have to say.

1. **It has a strong cultural impact:**

Cold Call will help you distribute work around the room not only more fully, but more authoritatively. One of its positive effects is that it establishes that the room belongs to you. Not only will this allow you to reach out to individual students, but it will have a strong cultural effect in that it will draw out engagement.

How do I conduct Cold Call?

1. Prepare: For Cold call to be most effective, questions must be prepared in advance: the question and what an answer could look like should be clear. Every teacher has had the experience of asking a student a question that in retrospect wasn’t clear, where even a well-informed and engaged student wouldn’t know what to say.
2. Scaffold: This technique is especially effective when you start with simple questions and progress to harder ones, drawing students in, engaging them on terms that emphasise what they already know, and reinforcing basic knowledge before pushing for greater rigor and challenge.
3. Time the name. Question. Pause. Name. This ensures that every student hears the question and begins preparing an answer during the pause you’ve provided. Since students know a cold call is likely but not who will receive it, every student is likely to answer the question, with one student merely called on to give their answer aloud.

What might this look like?

**Teacher**: Read the sentence, please. *[pause]* Chris.

**Chris:** “Have you seen a pumpkin seed?”

**Teacher**: Do we have a subject here? *[pause]* Jawaad?

**Jawaad:** Yes.

**Teacher:** What’s the subject? *[pause]* Jawaad, again?

**Jawaad**: The subject is “you.”

**Teacher** “You.” Excellent. Do we have a verb here? *[pause]* Eric?

**Eric:** Yes.

**Teacher** What’s the verb? *[pause]* James?

**James:** The verb is “seen.”