

# Call and Response

## Overview:

Call and Response is as it sounds, a choral response in unison to expand participation and build energy and momentum. The teacher asks a questions or shares information and the whole class responds to answer the question or repeat the phrase.

## Purpose:

Call and Response gives all students the opportunity for practice and retrieval in a safe environment with low risk. This strategy has been repeatedly identified as a culturally responsive practice that builds participation, connection, and community, while simultaneously igniting and cueing the brain to pay attention. When done correctly and inclusively, Call and Response can also increase memory building and strengthen information processing which is a key ingredient in closing achievement gaps.

Call and Response supports our ability to coordinate and build bonds with others, which is a basic human need as a species, and part of creating cohesive community in a supportive learning environment. The practice also balances our individualistic tendencies into a more collective connection. The practice briefly but visibly makes everyone in the room part of something together.

## Application: When and where can I use it?

Call and Response is an instructional routine that is applicable to grades K-12. While it might look different in purpose and frequency within an established routine in elementary and secondary classrooms, it can be used thoughtfully at all levels to support instruction. Application of the practice allows the teacher to check collective comprehension, initiate information retrieval and build memory, model pronunciation, or motivate as a group.

Call and Response requires intentional use and establishment of norms with modeling. It is important to build this routine early in the school year or a new semester. This instructional practice only supports learning and connection if students are truly in unison and all voices are included. Being explicit with how and when you will cue students, practicing wait time or repeating while developing the routine to ensure all voices are participating, and reflecting on why you use the practice with students will build purpose into the routine.

## Getting Started: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Call and Response is a small but mighty piece of classroom culture that can create moments of connection and inform next steps in instruction for teachers. The routine needs to be built into classroom norms of participation that are visible and universal. Early in the year, share with students how you will use the practice, when, and why as you co-create rules or norms.

Consider how you will "cue" students to join in the routine. Examples include counting in ("One, two..."), word signals ("Class!" or "Everybody!") and nonverbal gestures (hand signals). One additional way to cue students is through a vocal tone shift that is consistent and recognized by all. This is likely the most effective but challenging. You might lower your tone or volume on the last few words of a prompt and include wait time, which signals students to respond.

Monitor participation. If you recognize that not all responded, repeat the prompt to ensure full participation. This routine works well in balance with cold calling to keep engagement and focus high.

Some explicit purposes for Call and Response Include (Lemov, 2021):

- Retrieval Practice and Memory Building
  - Ask as a question: "What do we call it when two very different characters are put side by side for emphasis?" Class responds, "Juxtaposition!"
- Pronunciation
  - Frame with new learning or to correct misunderstandings: "I'm hearing some challenge with how to pronounce our new word, condensation. Condensation on two- one, two..."
- Connection and Motivation
  - Celebrate success of an individual and build connection- In response to a successful answer from a student, cue the class to join in a supportive reply such as "Nice work, John!" or "Nailed it!" Be mindful of this one that this does not come through as disingenuous or inconsistent.

Elementary teachers might build this in to support pronunciation of content vocabulary, power words, or to correct mispronunciations. This may sound like "The first word we will learn today is exemplify. Exemplify on two- one, two..." Then have an individual student define through cold calling or another established participation technique.

Secondary teachers might build this into a lesson on the spot when identifying a need for storage of a key piece of information in long term memory for the group. Consider using a "Tell me" sentence starter that prompts students to supplement or retrieve the answer together.

Above all, it is imperative this routine is not overused by the teacher or under accessed by students. Remain aware of the purpose for use, what you are having students repeat, and why.

### **See this Instructional Move in action:**

[TLAC: How Sadie McCleary Manages Student Participation](#)

### **Read more about this Instructional Move:**

Book: [Teach Like a Champion 3.0: 63 Techniques That Put Students On the Path to College](#) (Doug Lemov, 2021)

Article: [Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Using Call and Response to Deepen Thinking, Part I](#)

Article: [50 Fun Call-and-Response Ideas to Get Students' Attention](#)