

4. Checking for Understanding

Facilitation techniques are often designed to promote student to student interaction, but it cannot be assumed that students are gaining understanding from these interactions. Instead, it is important that you check for understanding during the session.

The most common method for checking understanding is to ask students closed questions such as “do you understand?” However, this is not an effective method of checking for understanding, as students may be uncomfortable admitting they don’t understand, especially if in front of a group, or lots of time has been spent on a topic. Instead, open questions should be used.

It is vital that students can explain the discussed topics in their own words or use methods to solve new problems on their own. If you think students haven’t “got” the topic or method, you should discuss it again. Facilitators should create opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding.

Possible ways to check for understanding include:

- Maintain eye contact with students during the session – you can often tell when students are confused.
- Ask someone to summarise the concept you have just covered, asking the group to help if they are struggling.
- Ask a volunteer to write the main points of the discussion on the board.
- Ask questions that require the student to understand in order to answer correctly.
- Make mistakes and see if the students notice, ask them to correct the mistakes if they do. Use this method infrequently to avoid confusing students.
- Ask students to rephrase questions or responses during the session.
- Ask for real-life examples or applications of concepts or methods.
- Ask for a similar problem, metaphor, or analogy.