

Stop-and-Process Activities

When I work with teachers to improve student comprehension and retention during learning, I always focus their attention on Stop-and-Process activities. These quick checks for understanding help *all* students make sense of what they are learning, but they are particularly helpful to struggling learners. These students often need more time to process what they hear. They need to see something in writing in order to make the information more memorable. They need a few moments to catch up. Too often, we have quickly moved on.

The Stop-and-Process strategies I recommend are easy to use. Stop and Jots, Jot-Pair-Share, QuickWrites, Sum-It-Up!'s, and Exit Cards give students time to pause, reflect, and write or draw to help make information memorable. The variety of strategies appeals to a range of learners because some activities involve writing, others drawing, and still others involve interacting with peers. Because the strategies are generally open-ended, students can respond to these Stop-and-Process activities at their own level of readiness.

Most of the activities can be used at the beginning of a lesson (as a formative assessment) to help students activate prior knowledge and to help teachers assess what students already know. They can also be used during the middle of a lesson (as a medial assessment) to provide students with adequate opportunity to make sense of information and provide teachers with a tool to check for understanding. Finally, they can be used at the end of a lesson (as a summative assessment) to provide an opportunity for closure and a quick check, once again, for understanding and/or misconceptions. Embedded in daily teaching and learning, these thinking strategies engage our learners in deeper processing and provide us with quick and ongoing assessments of our students, informing our instruction each step of the way (Figure 2.7).

WHEN TO USE STOP-AND-PROCESS ACTIVITIES		
<p>As a Formative Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To activate prior knowledge (what background knowledge, structures, or schemata are already in place?) • To assess prior knowledge (what do they already know?) • To inform instruction (what can you learn about students and their knowledge to plan lessons thoughtfully and purposefully?) 	<p>As a Medial Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide “wait time” for processing • To provide time for students to create a written summary of an auditory lesson • To provide closure before moving from one sub-topic or skill to another during a lesson • To inform instruction 	<p>As a Summative Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To check for understanding and/or misconceptions • To see student thinking about the key ideas of the lesson or unit • To provide an opportunity for students to respond to the essential questions of the lesson or unit • To provide time for students to find personal relevance in the learning, to make connections, and to note relationships

Figure 2.7



TEACHER REFLECTION

Frequent Stop-and-Jots are the perfect solution to keeping some very distractible students on task!

— FOURTH-GRADE TEACHER



Whoever explains learns.

DAVID SOUSA

Stop and Jot (During- & Post-Learning)

A **Stop and Jot** is a two- to five-minute check for understanding. Students each record their perception of a key idea or concept about a topic or reading in a boldly colored rectangle that they have drawn on their paper or in their notebook. At least once during a lesson, stop and pose an important question for students to respond to in their quickly drawn “stop box.” Have volunteers share one or two responses with the whole class, or model your own response on the chalkboard or overhead. These boxes serve to aid students later as a study tool, standing out with their bright colors and highlighting important information from the reading or about the topic.

Jot-Pair-Share (During- & Post-Learning)

A **Jot-Pair-Share** is adapted from the Think-Pair-Share activity (Lyman, 1981) in which students are provided time to think and then talk about a topic in pairs before speaking in front of the whole class. I prefer that each student not just think, but record, or jot down, his or her thoughts *before* pairing with a partner. This can significantly change what takes place during the pairing. In the original activity, the partner who is more verbal, more outgoing, and quicker to process information will likely present his or her ideas first. The other partner may shut down, agreeing with the points just made and making no original contribution of his or her own. By having both partners jot first, each one is more likely to have something to share. Through this brief conversation in which students “do the explaining,” we address the need for learners to articulate concepts in their own words and to learn from one another, but we also keep them focused by providing a specific task to complete or question to answer.

QuickWrite (During- & Post-Learning)

A **QuickWrite** is a timed piece of writing on a topic posed by the teacher. Students are given between 90 seconds and two minutes to write freely or respond to a given question or statement (“Tell me how decimals and fractions are related.” “How does geography affect the occupations of people in different parts of the world?”). This activity gives students time to process auditory information, and it frees the teacher up to go over to struggling learners who might need additional guidance in thinking about the topic. QuickWrites invite students to use the vocabulary of a discipline to express their knowledge. In fact, you can provide students with important terms and ask them to use several of those terms in their writing. Because the activity is limited to a short amount of time, even reluctant writers are willing to communicate their ideas in this way.