

Concept Check Questions

When introducing or revising language, be it grammar or vocabulary, it is crucial that students understand the underlying meaning or concept. One way of making sure they do is by asking concept check questions (CCQs). These concept check questions highlight the meaning of the language item and are neater and more effective than the teacher simply re-explaining the meaning. Using CCQs also lets ELLs avoid having to give complex definitions of meaning.

Designing Concept Check Questions

To design CCQs, reduce the piece of target language (TL) down to its basic meaning.

e.g. Topsy (adj)

It means: 1. The feeling you get after a few alcoholic drinks.

2. the feeling causes you to laugh

3. it doesn't make you so sick to vomit

Now change the statements into questions:

CCQs: 1. If I am tipsy, how many drinks did I have? (3 – 4, a few)

2. Do I laugh? (yes)

3. Do I vomit? (no)

Good concept check questions:

- Shouldn't use the target language itself.
- Should be graded, so that the language in the questions is simpler than TL.
- Should check just the TL, not something else in the sentence.
- Should focus on the one particular meaning you're trying to teach.
- Should cover all the basic areas of concept and potential confusion.
- Should have unambiguous answers (which you need to plan).
- Should be limited in number (up to 3-4 is enough)
- Should not become a guessing game!

Source: Teaching House, New York, CELTA course materials

Examples:

A. He had to get up at 6 a.m.

- Did he get up at 6 a.m? (YES)
- Did he choose to get up at 6 a.m? (NO)
- Did he want to get up early? (probably not)

B. He told me a secret.

- Do you tell a secret to everyone? (NO)
- Who would you tell a secret to? (maybe your sister, best friend...)

C. It is your responsibility to come to class on time.

- Is this something you can do or something you have to do? (Have to)
- Can somebody else do this for you? (NO)

Practice with checking

Let's consider the following examples. Which of the following questions would be good concept check questions, and why?

Calm

- 1) What does "calm" mean?
- 2) If I'm calm, do I serenely face the trials and tribulations of life?
- 3) If I'm calm, do I scream and shout?
- 4) Does calm rhyme with arm?
- 5) Is it a good idea to be calm in an emergency?

Source: Teaching House, New York, CELTA course materials

Under the weather

- 1) Is my health particularly ailing or am I predisposed to a more salubrious state of being?
- 2) Am I standing under a cloud?
- 3) If I'm feeling under the weather, would I go to hospital? Would I go to work?
- 4) If I feel under the weather, what might be wrong with me?
- 5) Am I under or over the weather?

Stages of covering vocabulary

1. Convey and/or elicit the vocabulary (TL)
2. Check the meaning with a CCQ
3. Model and drill the pronunciation
4. Put the word on the board
5. Write the part of speech in parenthesis
6. Mark word stress, silent letters, tricky phonemes

Source: Teaching House, New York, CELTA course materials